MY FRIEND PHIL

ISABEL M.
PEACOCKE

5^{00}
/F

BERTRAND SMITH'S
ACRES OF BOOKS
140 PACIFIC AVENUE
LONG BEACH CALIF.

Xmas 1918

To Francis

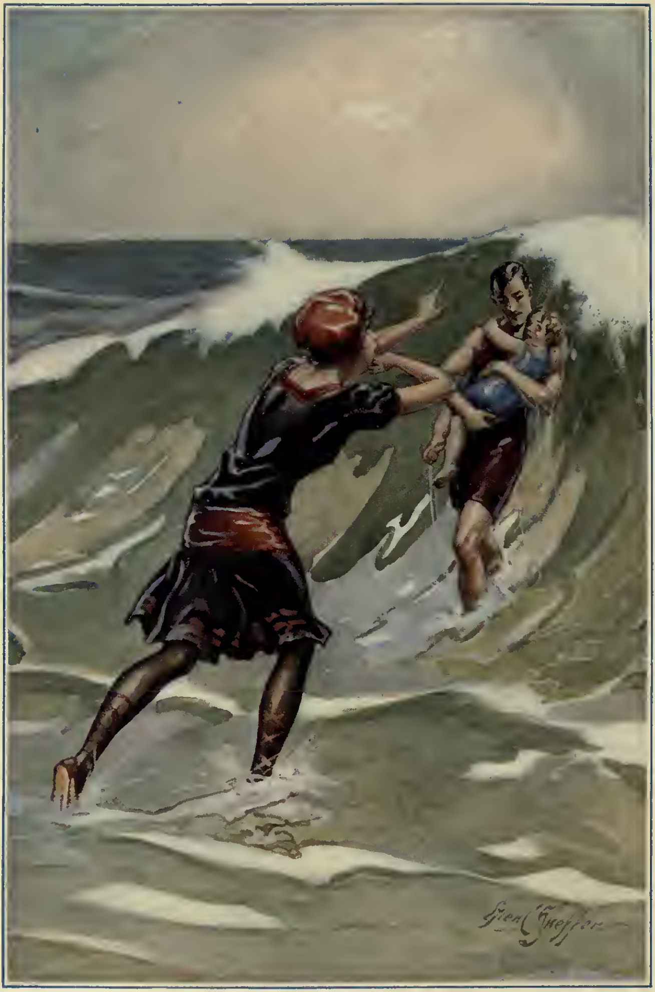
from

Jess & Hullie

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/myfriendphil00peaciala

MY FRIEND PHIL



Page 236

As I reached shallow water, and staggered up the beach, my knees felt weak

MY FRIEND PHIL

BY

ISABEL MAUD PEACOCKE

RAND McNALLY & COMPANY
CHICAGO NEW YORK

Copyright, 1915,
By RAND McNALLY & COMPANY

URL
SRLF ;4701362

THE CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. IN WHICH I BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH PHILIP AND SUNDRY OTHERS 7

II. IN WHICH WE MEET THE "SKETCH" GIRL AGAIN 32

III. IN WHICH WE RECEIVE AND WRITE A LETTER 54

IV. IN WHICH PHILIP GOES A-GADDING . . . 75

V. IN WHICH PHIL MAKES A NEW FRIEND . . 85

VI. IN WHICH WE IMPROVE OUR ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN . . 102

VII. IN WHICH THE SPINSTER PLAYS THE PART OF THE GOOD FAIRY 114

VIII. IN WHICH "THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES" FIGHT FOR ME 125

IX. IN WHICH PHIL AND I HAVE A NIGHT OUT . 135

X. IN WHICH PHIL AND I ENTERTAIN . . . 158

XI. IN WHICH THERE ARE "REWARDS" — AND "FAIRIES" 186

XII. IN WHICH PHIL HAS A "DOWN-RIGHT-BAD" DAY 207

CHAPTER PAGE
XIII. IN WHICH PHIL AND I FIND WOMEN WANTING 223
XIV. IN WHICH PHIL AND I TAKE TEA IN TOWN . 244
XV. IN WHICH PHIL AND I BLOW BUBBLES . . 259
XVI. IN WHICH WE COME VERY NEAR TRAGEDY 276
XVII. IN WHICH MY FRIEND PHIL APPROACHES THE VALLEY 292
XVIII. IN WHICH THE MYSTERIOUS D. A. REVEALS HIMSELF 315
XIX. IN WHICH WE "ALL LIVE HAPPY EVER AFTER" 324

MY FRIEND PHIL

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH I BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH PHILIP AND SUNDRY OTHERS

PHILIP and I became acquainted under unusual and somewhat painful circumstances, but my interest in and affection for Philip, dating from that hour, have never been shaken. My first estimate of his character—of his admirable coolness under nerve-shaking ordeals, of his absolute integrity and uncompromising attitude to humbug of all kinds, of his practical common sense and calm logic—has remained unchanged. I am proud to name him one of my friends. That he thinks as highly of me I hardly dare hope. He has, I know, an interest in and affection for me, but I rather suspect in him a contempt for certain of my weaknesses. I try to explain away these weaknesses by telling Philip that when one is "grown up" one must unfortunately act as other "grown-ups" do, stupid as it may appear. And Philip looks at me with his very solemn gray eyes and asks directly, "Why?"

Philip is so very direct. And without going round in a circle and repeating myself I have no answer unless it be the March Hare's famous and obvious retort, "Why not?" and then I know Philip would floor me badly with his very superior logic. But to return to our first meeting. It took place at a dentist's, or rather in the dreary ante-room to the torture chamber, common to dental establishments, which invariably contained a center table, of mottled bamboo for preference, bearing an untidy collection of dilapidated and out-of-date magazines and day-before-yesterday's paper; several chairs and a couch with its springs thinly covered; a pot-bound palm on a rickety stand, a picture or two on the wall, and a framed certificate stating the full right and capability to torture, of the President of the Torture Chamber beyond.

Well, there we sat in a heavy silence, relieved only by an occasional yawn or sigh. There were four of us. There was an elderly gentleman with a red face and spectacles, who, having picked up a newspaper from the table and perused it for ten minutes with every sign of impatience, had suddenly discovered it to be three days old, and cast it from him in indignant disgust, so that it now lay in a crumpled heap on the faded carpet. There was a spinster of uncertain age and somewhat severe aspect, who sat bolt upright and worked at a piece of white work, and occasionally cast impatient glances at the closed door. There was a pretty girl sitting on the springless couch and listlessly turning the pages of a *Sketch*, who now and again addressed a remark to an Irish terrier, curled up on the edge of her skirt, the dog responding with a thump of a stumpy tail and very speaking looks from a pair of beautiful cairngorm eyes. Lastly, there was my humble self, pretending to be interested in a small treatise (picked up from the table) dealing with "Cause and Effect of Decay in Teeth." The effect I knew well enough, to my sorrow; the cause I was not concerned with, and I was becoming frankly bored, and had taken to studying my boots with an intent scrutiny, while working industriously at a small hole in the carpet with the point of my cane, when a diversion occurred. This was no more nor less than the advent of Philip. Yes, it was more, for with Philip was Philip's mother. I have forgotten her name—never mind it. Beside Philip she fades into insignificance. I never thought, or think, of her but as Philip's mother. That circumstance alone constitutes her claim to attention, as an adjunct (entirely superfluous, it seemed to me, but I believe Philip has a kindly and tolerant interest in the woman) as, in short, a background—a very hazy, shifty background—to Philip's very solid personality.

Well, into the silence of that room, charged with all the sighs of boredom, nervous expectation, and shrinking anticipation, came the sound of pattering feet, the sharp tinkle of an electric bell, and then, on an almost visible breeze, curiously compounded of violet powder, Divinia perfume, new kid shoes, and dying roses, Philip's mother floated into the room, to the adjoining accompaniment of bangles and chains, the rustling of silken petticoats, and the tapping of high heels. With her was Philip, in a very small compact costume of the shirt and knickerbocker style, belted in trimly at the waist. He wore no hat, and his thick blond hair was cropped boyishly above a very square forehead, from under which a pair of honest gray eyes looked steadily at all the world. His small square face was determined;

his lips red and very firm above a strong little chin; a few freckles ornamented a nondescript nose and—positively that was all. No woman would think of calling Philip a "beautiful child," or of dressing him in Lord Fauntleroy costumes, or of training his hair into long ringlets. Philip's crop of obstinate, abundant light hair had not the suspicion of a wave in it, a fact which I afterwards often heard his mother lament. But dogs always took to him naturally, and old ladies never fidgeted when he was in the room. He now gazed about him very steadily for a moment, and apparently finding nothing of interest (he had not yet spied the dog), took a length of knotted string from his pocket and fell to untying the knots with an air of detached calm, enviable under the circumstances. At the tinkle of the bell the white-capped attendant of the High Priest of Pain had appeared, and Philip's mother at once swept round upon her, and I discovered (what an enormous hat had concealed) that I was acquainted with the lady, and with a sudden spasm of feverish interest in the "Cause and Effect" I retired precipitately behind its pages.

"I wish to see Mr. Pullem at once, please," said Philip's mother in a high-pitched voice, repeating "at once" very firmly.

"You have an appointment, madam?" asked the attendant.

"No, but I wish my little boy's tooth pulled, and I have a very important engagement at three-thirty."

She glanced impatiently at a tiny gold wrist watch.

"I am afraid, madam, in that case you will have to wait your turn. All these ladies and gentlemen are before you."

"Oh, but I am sure, under the circumstances—an important engagement and my little boy in pain with an aching tooth——"

"It 's not aching a bit, mummy," interjected Philip, looking up a moment from his string, but his mother swept on— "Under these circumstances, I say, I feel sure that none of these ladies and gentlemen will mind waiting—as they have waited so long already."

She smiled sweetly round, but a discouraging silence met this rather remarkable bit of reasoning.

"If you can arrange it then with the other patients——" she too looked round.

The young lady became immediately absorbed in her *Sketch;* the spinster gave one very expressive look, but said nothing; and the elderly gentleman, with a snort, muttered something about "too much time wasted as it is," and a "parcel of children." As for me, I steadily absorbed the information that the "milk teeth usually loosen at the early age of six or seven," which recalled to mind the pathetic history of little Willie, who went to heaven at the same interesting age, but I was really listening to Philip's mother.

"Dear me," she remarked, "how very disobliging and inconsiderate! Then I am to miss my appointment, I suppose," in a tone of injured resentment implying that the responsibility of that was certainly on the company. "An important engagement, too," she went on "very — and I was to be there at three o'clock sharp."

"No, mummy," corrected Philip calmly, without looking up (I could not sufficiently admire the concentration with which he worked at his string), "Cousin Dick said four o'clock, and I 'spect he 'll wait. He always does, you know, and the cakes are sure not to be all gone at the tea shop, if you *are* a bit late."

She had the grace to redden, and I heard a stifled sound from behind the *Sketch*, and something suspiciously like a sniff from the spinster. At the same time I caught the *Sketch* Girl's eye. It was brimming with merriment, but at this moment, having incautiously lowered my "Cause and Effect," the worst happened.

Philip's mother saw me. Instantly her look of pettish perplexity changed to a beaming smile, and she sailed across the room with outstretched hand, crying:

"Mr. Lingard, how very fortunate. Who 'd have thought of meeting you here, of all places in the world?"

I endeavored to explain, somewhat stiffly, that I was by no means exempt from the natural ills that flesh is heir to, and the circumstances of finding me at a dentist's was not so very singular, any more than in any one else. But she was not listening. In a little gust of confidence she inclined toward me.

"Well, now, will you do me a favor—a great favor? My little boy—shake hands, Phil—has been crying with toothache——"

"Mummy," said Phil reproachfully, after giving me his hand. "I did n't cry—not exactly *cry*, you know. I only shut my teef and made a little noise—and—and there was a little water in my eyes—that 's all."

"Was that all, darling? Well, anyhow, the poor darling was in agony all night——"

"Not all night! It did n't begin till 'leven o'clock," explained Phil. "I know, 'cos I 'm learning to tell the time, and when the pain woke me I fought I might as well pracsit the time, so I got out of bed an' looked, an' the big hand was on——"

"There, there, dear," said his mother, adding, to me, "Phil has a passion for accuracy."

"No, I have n't, 'scuse me," said Phil, rather red in the face, though not knowing in the least with what he was charged.

"But my favor, Mr. Lingard. You won't refuse me, I know. I have a most—I have an engagement for three-thirty—for four o'clock. Would you be so kind as to take charge of Phil till I return? He won't be the least trouble. You 'll stay with Mr. Lingard, dear, won't you? He is going to look after you till mother comes back from—from the business she has to see to."

"The tea, you mean," said Phil, adding rather wistfully, "You promised I could have the cake with the pink sugar and the cherry on top."

"I 'll save it for you."

"Thank you," adding very heroically: "If you want that one *very* much—or Cousin Dick takes it 'fore you can get a chance (but it 's ladies first, you know, so he ought n't) save me the curly one with the cream. There are always six," he explained to me, the "two sammidges with jam and cream, a curly one with cream—not much cream—you 'd think it was full, but it never is," with the sad, wise air of one with one more illusion shattered; "then there 's a round one with cream, and one with lots of bits stuck together with jam, and one with pink sugar and a cherry on top, and that 's all."

"Well," said his mother, "I promise I 'll save a nice one, and now I must go. A thousand thanks, Mr. Lingard. So delighted to have the chance of seeing you, and *so* kind of you to offer to mind Phil. Be a good boy, darling. *Good*-by!"

She was hurrying away when I stopped her in alarm.

"But—but—" I cried in alarm, "I can't—What shall I do if you 're not back in time for the boy's turn to go in?"

"Oh, in that case," she said, her face clouding, "we 'll have to put it off till another day. You would n't mind very much, dear?"

"Yes, I would, 'scuse me," said Phil promptly, "'cos daddy has given me a shilling to have it out to-day."

"Well, you could keep that, could n't you?"

Phil considered, then shook his head very decidedly.

"No," he said, "'cos this shilling was to make me feel happy when the pain was aching me, and if I have it now, when I do have the tooth out I 'll have not nothing to comfort me, and I 'll have forgot how nice I felt with this shilling."

"Then I 'll give you another, little mercenary!" cried his mother, whose patience was plainly going. "Will that do?"

Philip looked sad, but determined.

"No," he said slowly, "'cos then I 'd have daddy's shilling for not doing nothing, and that 's not fair, is it?" He appealed to me, as to a man's nicer sense of honor, to uphold him.

"Well," said his mother, "I can't waste any more time. If I should n't be back, Mr. Lingard —I 'm certain to be though" (as I jumped visibly)—"tell the dentist I insist on Philip's having gas. He is very brave, but extremely high-strung and sensitive, poor darling, all nerves."

I looked at the "poor darling," still busied with his string, at which during the whole colloquy he had never ceased to work, and thought I had never seen a more unlikely subject for "nerves,"—one more unruffled, calm.

"Then *good*-by, darling. *Good*-by, dear Mr. Lingard—so *many* thanks. You won't mind mummy leaving you, Phil?"

"Oh, no," said Phil cheerfully, submitting to be kissed.

"And you 'll like being with kind Mr. Lingard?"

"I don't know yet," returned Phil honestly, and I liked him for that.

In a moment she was gone, perfumes and jingles and all. For five minutes Philip was very quiet with his string, but finally, having it all smoothed out to his satisfaction, he rolled it into a neat ring, put it in his pocket with a sigh of relief, leaned back in his chair, tilted his chin back, and studied the ceiling intently.

Then he remarked to the Elderly Gentleman:

"Bet you don't know how many boards in this ceiling?"

The Elderly Gentleman, with a grunt, immediately snatched up the discarded paper and ostentatiously buried himself in its pages. Hints were wasted on Phil.

"Try!" he said encouragingly. "I would n't of guessed my own self if I had n't counted them first."

No reply. Phil slipped down from his chair and laid his hand on the Elderly Gentleman's knee.

"It is n't twenty-free," he said insinuatingly.

As much to his own surprise as to that of any one else, the Elderly Gentleman lowered his paper and said:

"Twenty-four, then."

"No," said Phil, "but you 're pretty 'warm.'"

Thus encouraged, the Elderly Gentleman responded promptly:

"Twenty-five!"

Phil shook his head mournfully.

"You're getting cold again," he said, and the Elderly Gentleman plunged wildly.

"Twenty-six."

"Colder 'n colder," said Phil solemnly.

"Then, my boy, I'm sure I don't know," said the Elderly Gentleman, apparently nettled at his failure.

"Give in?" cried Phil delightedly, but at this the Elderly Gentleman suddenly exhibited symptoms of backbone.

"No, I won't," he said. "I'll have another shot."

"Very well," said Phil, disappointed, "but they gen'ally give in, you know, after *free* tries."

"*I* don't," said the other obstinately. "Let me see, now, I'll say——"

"Don't look!" cried Phil warningly.

"I was n't," cried the Elderly Gentleman indignantly.

"I thought p'r'aps you might be just squinting. I do sometimes," added Phil manfully. "But I'll help you a teeny—it is n't twenty-one, and it is n't twenty-free, but it's something between."

"Twenty-two," cried the Elderly Gentleman instantly.

"Right!" cried Phil, clapping his hands, "I knew you'd guess it. You could n't be as quick as me, of course. You're like my gran'pa, so old, you see—about a hundred I s'pose?"

The Elderly Gentleman became apoplectic; the *Sketch* Girl, who had been listening shamelessly to an entirely private conversation, gave a sudden trill of laughter, and then immediately bent over her book and pretended somebody else had done it. And as no one could have possibly suspected the severe Spinster of such an indiscretion, the onus was left on me, and I felt annoyed until I reflected that I'd rather like to be suspected of such a musical laugh as that.

"God bless my soul," sputtered Phil's new-found friend, "I was sixty last birthday."

"I was six on my birfday," said Phil, "an' I had a cake with my name an' how old I was in pink sugar. Did you have one with—with—all that?"

The Elderly Gentleman shook his head.

"No! no! I could n't afford such extravagance as that."

Phil looked concerned, and then he and his friend entered into an interesting conversation as to how much the latter earned in a week, what his chief items of expenditure were, and whether he thought, if he saved, he might be able to have a pink-sugared cake next birthday, and the Elderly Gentleman, who had been snapping open a gold watch every few minutes, and glaring at the closed door of the torture chamber, now looked quite sorry when he was summoned. He shook hands with Phil, and hoped they might meet again, and Phil politely echoed the wish, but added cheerfully he "did n't think they ever would, though," and further proffered the advice that if it "hurts very much, keep on thinking about the shilling, and what you're going to buy with it."

Phil next spied the *Sketch* Girl's dog, and literally fell upon him with cries of delight, and the dog, with that delightful free-masonry of dogs and boys, responded in like spirit. They rolled over and over for a bit, and then Phil sat up, with his arm about the dog's neck, and asked its mistress:

"Is he yours?"

The girl smiled and nodded.

"What's his name?"

"His name is Gyp."

"Oh!"

"Don't you like it?"

"I don't think it's a very nice name for a dog—'specially such a nice dog."

"What would you call him then?"

"Terry—that's a proper dog name."

"And what is your name, little boy?"

"Philip—what's yours?"

"Mine is Millicent," said the *Sketch* Girl, smiling.

"Millersint," repeated Phil slowly. "That's a nice name—it makes me feel jolly."

"Jolly? How do you mean?"

"Millers, you know. There was the 'jolly miller' lived on the river D, you know, an' he cared for nobody, no-nott-i, an' nobody cared for him, and there was the other 'jolly miller' with 'one hand in the copper and the other in the bag'—how *could* he make a grab, with both of his hands in the copper and the bag?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, Philip. It does seem pretty impossible."

"I think I'll call you Miller."

"Very well," laughed the *Sketch* Girl, "and now—tell me, have you a dog?"

"Yes," answered Phil, rolling his canine friend over. "His name is Terry."

"O! I *see!*" her eyes were dancing. "And what kind of a dog is he—a collie?"

"No, he's not!"

"Then what?"

"Just a dog," replied Phil gravely, adding quickly, "What are you laughing at?"

"I'm not laughing, Phil, really," declared the *Sketch* Girl, with the suspicious quaver of some recent emotion in her voice.

"You were laughing inside," said Phil accusingly. "I saw you chin shiver."

At this the laugh would have its way, and I joined in the merriment.

"Is n't he delicious?" said the *Sketch* Girl to me with dancing eyes. They were the dearest brown eyes. Phil turned red. It seems he hates to be laughed at. Scrambling up from the floor, he turned his attention to the Spinster.

"What are you making?" he asked.

The Spinster made no reply, but continued her work.

Phil advanced his face to within an inch of hers.

"'Scuse me shouting," he said very loudly, "but I think you must be a bit deaf, like my gran'pa. I ast you what was you making?"

"Little boys should n't ask questions," rapped out the Spinster, but her glance was a little softer as it rested on the boy.

"But you would n't never of told me, if you did n't know I wanted to know," urged Phil, very sensibly. "Is it a little fishing net?"

"No—it is n't a fishing net."

"You're making it very nicely," said Phil politely, and the Spinster actually smiled. He went on hopefully, "If it is n't a fishing net, it must be something else."

Phil is nothing if not persistent, I noted, and the lady suddenly capitulated.

"It's a piece of lace—see," she explained, "to trim a little boy or girl's frock."

"Have you any little boys?" asked Phil.

"No, indeed," responded the Spinster with energy.

"Any little girls?"

"No!"

"Not even a dog?" There was a world of commiseration in his tones.

"I should think not," said the Spinster.

"Then I'm very, very sorry for you," said Phil sincerely, "an' I would come an' be your little boy if I had n't of belonged to some one else 'fore I saw you."

"You're a dear little boy," said the Spinster suddenly, and inclined impulsively toward him, but, recollecting herself, sat bolt upright, looking with a certain air of proud suspicion at the *Sketch* Girl and myself. But the former was bending over her dog—she had just done so suddenly—and I was apparently absorbed again in "Cause and Effect," so the Spinster said, low and hurriedly:

"Would you—would you give me a kiss, my dear?"

Philip considered. I held my breath. Phil did not look like a "kissing" child, and I stiffened to hear the refusal which would congeal the melting heart of the old maid to ice again. But Phil has a heart of gold and the instincts of a gentleman—I trust any gentleman in his situation would have been no more churlish—and he said slowly:

"Yes, I think I will—if you like," I heard a sigh, it seemed of relief, from the *Sketch* Girl. "I don't gen'ally kiss strangers." Two sturdy arms went round the withered neck, a round warm little cheek and two soft lips were pressed against the faded cheek. Then Phil said gently, with a little wriggle. "Now put me down, please. You've cried all over my face," adding hastily, "but it does n't matter, though."

It was as well that, at that moment, the Spinster got her summons, for I saw the tears on her cheeks as she hurried away. Phil planted himself in front of me in a stooping position, his hands on his knees, and seemed intently studying my collar stud.

"What on earth are you doing?" I asked him, to which he replied with a counter-question.

"Do yours stay in all the time, or do they take out and in like gran'pa's?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Your teef," he explained. "Gran'pa says they give you two sets for nothing, but the next lot you must pay for. Did you pay for yours?'

"Well," I said laughing, "these were a presentation lot, but I have to pay pretty heavily to keep them."

Just then the *Sketch* Girl rose to go into the next room.

"Good-by, Philip," she said.

"Good-by, Miller," he responded, holding out his hand.

"Won't you give me a kiss?" she asked, holding his hand tenderly.

"No, thank you," he answered gravely, "but I'll pat your dog."

"Oh, but you gave the other lady a kiss."

"'Cos she was lonely, and had no one to kiss her—but you aren't like that—plenty of people'll kiss you."

"Oh! I don't know about that," she replied with a laugh and a very charming color in her cheeks. Phil turned to me.

"You'd kiss her, wouldn't you?" he asked anxiously, but before I could make a suitable response, she was gone.

"Philip," I said, "I'd very much like to know that young lady's name."

"Why?" said he.

"Well—er—I might meet her again, and I shouldn't know what to call her."

"Call her Miller," he suggested easily.

"She mightn't like that—my not being an old and privileged friend like yourself. What shall I do about it?"

"Ask her," suggested Phil, with his sound common sense, and I might have acted on his suggestion had not the *Sketch* Girl, very meanly, left by another door.

The attendant came then, and said that Mr.

Pullem thought it better to attend to the little boy's extraction first, as my gold-filling might take some time. I assented, but with rather a sinking heart, Phil's mother, after the perfidious manner of women, still being absent.

"Would you like to come and see it being substracted?" asked Phil of me, very solemnly.

"No, thanks, Phil," I said briskly. "I'll wait here."

"You can come if you like, you know," he said magnanimously.

"Not for worlds, old chap," said I.

"Would n't you like to see me in the red velvet chair being screwed up to the highest screw of all?" he put forward as an inducement. I shook my head, and Phil became very silent a while. Finally I heard a small voice:

"Please—won't you come in with me?"

His gray eyes were very wide and steady, but there was the faintest tremble in his tones and I thought the suspicion of a quiver in his lower lip, though he strove manfully to steady it. I could have kicked myself for my obtuseness.

"Why, old fellow," I cried, "why, certainly. I did n't think. There's nothing I'd like better than to see you in the big chair."

He beamed gratefully, and slipped a small hand confidingly in mine. I felt the friendly pressure of those warm, soft fingers long after they had left mine, and somehow it was a good feeling.

"Now, young fellow," said the dentist briskly, and swung him off his feet on to the big red velvet chair.

"Screw it up to its very highest screw, please," said Phil importantly, and there he sat and beamed at me as the chair rose, his silent beatific smile growing wider with each inch of ascent.

"Now open your mouth," said the dentist. "See this funny little glass I'm going to pop into it."

But Phil sat with closely locked jaws, very solemn now.

"Heavens," thought I, "is he going to kick and scream?"

"Come, now," said the dentist persuasively, "I'm not going to hurt you. Open."

Phil's teeth were firmly clenched, but he looked at me and I thought I detected reproach in his eye. I shifted uneasily.

"Come, old man!" I said weakly, trying unsuccessfully to infuse authority into my tone. Then Phil spoke.

"You have n't turned on the gas," he said pointedly.

"The gas—but it's broad daylight," cried the dentist.

"Oh," said I hurriedly, "his mother wishes him to have an anesthetic. He's so—er—sensitive and—er—all that."

"Nonsense!" said the dentist, catching Phil off his guard and tilting his head back. "A touch will have it out. There! It's all over," and he flourished a small pair of forceps in which a diminutive white tooth was firmly held. Surprise held Phil dumb. I think he was rather in the position of the young lady who was asked if she had screamed when kissed by surprise. He did n't know it was going to be done, so he did n't scream then, while it was being done he could n't scream, and when it was all over there was no use in screaming. Suddenly, however, he cried, with his eyes like saucers:

"Oh, it's bleeding! It's bleeding! Is it pouring?"

There was a tiny trickle of blood on his chin, and deeming the event warranted it, he opened his mouth for a good roar, but in doing so made an interesting discovery, and shut it again without roaring.

"I can put my tongue in it!" he cried. "My whole tongue—look! Can you do that?"

He demonstrated his new accomplishment several times, and then said:

"Now put a gold toof in—not the ones that won't come out like mummy's, but a take-in-and-out-one, 'cos if I got very poor an' wanted to buy a dog, I could give my gold toof for it."

He was rather disappointed to hear this was not practicable, and together we went out into the waiting room.

Phil's mother had just rustled in.

"It's out, mummy!" he cried. "Look!"

"Oh, my poor darling!" cried his mother. "Did he suffer much, Mr. Lingard? Don't fret any more. There! There! Did you miss me, Phil?"

"No, thank you," said Phil truthfully.

"But you 're glad to see me, sweetheart?"

"Oh, yes!" answered he dutifully. "Did you bring the one with the pink sugar on it?"

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH WE MEET THE "SKETCH" GIRL AGAIN

PHILIP has a very passion for numbers, for knowing exact quantities, dimensions, "length, breadth, depth, and height."

If I am walking with Phil—as I am very often, I am pleased to say—and find him in preoccupied mood, I know he is counting the paving blocks as we go, taking the nicest care not to set foot on any of the cracks. He knows to a nicety how many steps it takes to reach the foot of the stairs from the hall, and can tell you off-hand such interesting facts as how many street lamps one passes in a given distance, or how many collective legs there are in the team of horses we have just passed. This little idiosyncrasy of his makes it rather a labor to tell him a story, which he loves me to do. For instance, "The Three Bears," a favorite of his, runs somewhat in this style.

I: "Once upon a time there lived near a wood——"

Phil (who has evidently a private scale of distinction): "A wood or a forest?"

I: "A wood—just a plain wood."

Phil: "A big wood?"

I: "Yes, a big, dark wood."

Phil: "How big? 'S big as this garden an' the next door an' the next?"

I: "Bigger than that!"

Phil: "How much bigger?"

I: "As big as all the gardens in the street."

Phil: "Oh! G'won." (He thumps me in the waistcoat.)

I: "—near a wood, a little girl called Goldenhair and——"

Phil: "Why?"

I: "Why what?"

Phil: "Golden hair?"

I: "You know perfectly—because of her hair—because her corn-colored locks——"

Phil: "*What?*"

I: "Her corn-colored locks——"

Phil: "What's 'at mean?—corn-colored clocks?"

I (hastily): "Just that!—'her golden hair was hanging down her back'—let us proceed."

Phil: "All right. G'won!"

I: "She lived with her grandmother for many years, because her parents had died in her infancy."

Phil: "How did they get in there?"

I: "Oh, bother! They were dead, anyhow, and she——"

Phil: "Was her gran'pa dead too?"

I: "Yes, they all died when she was a little child."

Phil: "How old about?"

I: "Oh! five or six, and so ——"

Phil: "How old was she when she lived with her granny?"

I: "About your age."

Phil: "Six and a bit—then she could n't a' lived there many years."

I: "Well, well! Let me get on with the dashed—with the story. One day she went away into the wood, though she 'd been told never to go there because of the wild beasts ——"

Phil: "Then it *was* a forest—there are n't no wild beasts in a wood."

I: "There were in this wood. It was an enchanted—a fairy wood."

Phil: "Oh! G'won!"

I: "And she came to a teeny house with teeny teeny windows."

Phil: "About as big as a looking-glass?"

I (thinking to please a child's sense of proportion): "Yes, about that."

Phil (who of course knows the whole thing by heart much better than I do): "Then, however 's she going to jump out of the window when it comes?"

I (hastily): "Oh! for the same reason as the wild beasts. It was a fairy house."

Phil (silenced, but not convinced): "Oh! G'won!"

I: "When she saw the bowls of porridge ——"

Phil (severely): "You 're missing out a lot."

I (weakly): "Oh, was I?"

That is the worst of Phil, skip but one word, change but one line of the accepted version and he is down on you at once with a word-for-word correction. I come again without much interruption to the bowls of porridge.

I: "There she saw some bowls of porridge ——"

Phil: "How many bowls?"

I: "I don't know."

Phil: "There were three bowls —you knowed quite well."

I: "But so did you. Three bowls ——" (I pause dramatically.)

Phil: "Yes. G'won!"

I proceed without much further interruption, except for details asked and supplied as to the exact dimensions of Baby Bear's chair, the amount of porridge filched from Father Bear's bowl, and the number of stairs, and then we come to the really thrilling part of the story. Phil's eyes grow bigger, his interested face comes closer and closer to mine, his lips part a little more as the tale unfolds, and so absorbed is he, he even refrains from asking how many pillows Baby Bear's bed has. At the conclusion, he gives a long sigh and a short wriggle, and remarks:

"Now tell me another."

"No, no! It 's your turn. You tell one."

"I don't know any."

"Yes, you do, lots! I 'll not tell another till you tell me one."

"I only know one, then."

"Then let's have it."

Phil sighs, wriggles, gazes abstractedly at the ceiling, frowns, and finally recites at a rapid rate, and in a style of condensation, yet omitting no telling points, which should be the envy of the modern fiction writer.

"Once upon a time—little girl Goldenhair—near a forest—Grandmother—runned away—teeny house, looks in the window—goes inside—three bowls of porridge—tastes them—too hot! too cold! just right—three chairs—too high—too low—just right—chair breaks—upstairs—three beds—too hard—too soft—just right—falls to sleep. Bears come home: Somebody 's been eating my *porridge*—somebody 's been eating *my* porridge—somebody 's eaten all my porridge" (faithful imitation of voices).

"Somebody 's been sitting in my *chair*—somebody 's been sitting in *my* chair—somebody 's broked my chair to pieces. Go upstairs—somebody 's been lying in my *bed*—somebody's been lying in *my* bed—here 's a little girl on my bed. Come, an' let 's eat her up—" (Ditto—Ditto.) "Little girl wakes up—jumps out of window (could n't 've been teeny as a looking-glass)—runs home, an' that 's all—what are you laughing at?"

"I 'm so pleased to have you tell me such a nice story," I say, trying hard to steady my voice, and hiding my streaming eyes at the back of Phil's collar as he sits on my knee.

"Don't breave down my neck," he says briefly, with a wriggle, and then he is silent, and I know he is counting the buttons on my coat.

"Six," says he, "and four on the sleeves, counting one that is teared off. Why does n't some one sew on your buttons?"

"I 've no—one to do it, Phil."

"Why don't you get your mother to do it?"

This, I know, refers to one whom Phil politely calls "the lady what washes up."

I shook my head.

"I 'm afraid she would n't do it."

"Then why don't you get another mother?"

"I really think I 'll have to. Let 's go for a walk, and we might find one."

"Yes, let 's," cried Phil, slipping off my knee with alacrity.

"Where shall we go?"

"To the Gardens!"

"Very well, and we 'll take Terry, eh?"

Phil's face shone, than fell suddenly and he said reprovingly:

"You forget!"

"Forget what?"

"'Dogs not omitted'—on the gate, you know."

"Oh, oh, yes! Well, we 'll give Terry a run later. Come on!"

This is one of my happy Sundays, when Phil's mother lends me Phil for the whole day. Other days, when I run home for lunch to my bachelor quarters, Phil looks in about that time. He says:

"Mummy says I 'm not to ask, but I could stay to lunch if you was to ask me."

But Sundays are very good days. We understand, Phil and I, that these Sunday foregatherings are doomed to be soon ended, for Phil is to go to Sunday school. Already, on five mornings of the week, he goes to what he calls "Kindergarter," where he makes weird and wonderful objects out of some putty-like substance, animals whose tails and legs invariably fall off at the joining, and flowers the like of which never bloomed on this terrestrial sphere; and strange things, called by familiar names, from bits of colored paper cunningly folded. Heaven knows, now that he is becoming such a man of affairs, what new occupations will encroach upon his time. To-day has been wet, and I have been to the door many times, fearing my friend will not come, but he arrives, very rosy and damp, in a wet little greatcoat, and because he loves to run barefoot he assures me anxiously that his boots are wet and wet boots give people "ammonia." I teased him a bit, ruffled up his thick, damp hair, and finally took him on my knee and tugged at the damp laces. Soon Phil was sitting up on my knee, curling his bare pink toes in an ecstasy.

Then, slipping off, he turned head over heels several times, and finally, coming right side uppermost, inquired:

"What shall we do now?"

"What?" said I.

"Let 's play hidy-go-seek," said Phil.

"Let 's!" said I.

"Bones-I first hide," Phil said quickly, adding anxiously, "unless you want it very much."

"No, you have it," I said with a show of unselfishness, and Phil beamed and ran out of the room, calling as he did so:

"I 'll tell you when I 'm ready."

He was back in an instant, to whisper mysteriously:

"Don't look in the stair cupboard."

So, in obedience to his little piping "Ready!" I looked everywhere but in the stair cupboard—under the couch, under the table, behind the door and the curtains, and then every place else being exhausted, threw open the stair cupboard.

"Ha!" said I, "now it 's my turn!"

"That 's not fair," said Phil. "I told you not to look here. But you can have your turn," adding off-handedly, "under the table 's a good place to hide."

In an astonishingly short space of time Phil found me under the table. He was very pleased at his acumen, and hid in the bathroom next, and as he called out warningly: "Don't come here!" every time I approached his hiding place, I pretended to be unable to find him, and had to shout out, "I give in!" which pleased him very much and he came out. Then I hid in the broom cupboard, but time passing and it being very stuffy in there, I emerged rather fluey, and with dust in my eyes. I found Phil curled up in a big chair, nursing the cat and looking rather bored.

"Why!" said I. "Could n't you find me?"

"You were n't under the table," he said indifferently, "and Pussy came in, so I 've been playing with her instead."

Phil, as I might have remembered, invariably goes to my last hiding place, and never gets over his surprise at not finding me there.

"You 're a nice boy!" I said indignantly.

"Is n't it nearly dinner time?" he asked wistfully, and we repaired to the kitchen. It was Mrs. Binks' "Sunday out," so we had to get our own dinner.

Phil set the table, and I cooked the sausages. They always give me indigestion, but Phil loves them and especially he loves pricking them with a two-pronged fork, and seeing little sizzles of fat come out, and if one bursts its jacket, and writhes inside out, he is delighted.

The cloth was very long on one side, and short on the other, and the knives and forks were set back to front as it were, and Phil forgot to put saucers to the cups, but none of these things spoiled our appetites. And afterwards we washed up, and Phil broke a plate, but he pointed out gently but firmly that it was really my fault, as the plate was so wet "no wonder it slipped." Then, as it was still raining, I suggested we have a nap, and we went and lay down on my bed. Phil rolled all over me, thumped me in the chest once or twice, drew out my watch and informed me it was "half past, twenty past," and after trying unsuccessfully to open the back of it, yawned, rolled over on his back, shut his eyes very tight, and suggested "whoever went to sleep first" should let the other know. I assented gladly, and sweet peace reigned for exactly three seconds.

Then Phil very cautiously opened one eye, but catching mine, shut his again quickly, and lay very still a moment, sighed, fidgeted, and sat up, remarking he was tired of being asleep, and "let 's play horses." Being on the point of succumbing myself, I merely grunted, half opened my eyes, and shut them again. Then followed a period of torment, while small fingers endeavored to prop my eyes open, pulled my face this way and that, and rumpled my hair, while lips breathed into my ear an unintelligible jargon which I was too far gone to gather the import of. I made vague and blurred replies very wide of the mark, I dare say (for once I distinctly heard an "It's so silly, you know"), groaned, and grunted, and the last thing I remember is Phil astride of my chest, his fingers in my shirt collar. When I awoke the rain had ceased, and Phil was sound asleep, his fingers clutched in my watch chain, his bare legs disposed gracefully across my waistcoat. As I watched him, his eyes opened slowly. He rubbed them with his two little fists, yawned, stretched like a kitten, and sat up, remarking with no reference to the lapse of time: "Now what 'll we do?"

Then, as the sun was shining in a cloudless sky, followed our walk to the Gardens. The Gardens looked all the brighter for the rain; the grassy terraces, twinkling with a thousand gems in the sunlight, sloped down to the blue harbor waters. Nurse maids and mothers and fathers sat about on the green-painted seats, and children ran races on the grass. We found a seat which, being in the shade of a thickly leafed tree, was quite dry, and Phil's boot lace having worked loose I had to kneel on one knee in the damp grass to fix it. It was an obstinate lace, wet and knotted, and Phil proffered advice in his cool clear little voice as to its undoing. A young lady on the same seat, apparently absorbed in a book, turned quickly and exclaimed: "Why, it *is* Philip! How do you do, Philip?"

I lifted my hat hastily, and scrambled awkwardly to my feet.

It was none other than the *Sketch* Girl, looking charming in a white frock and large hat, and her eyes were alight with pleasure at the meeting. But alas, it was at Phil she smiled, and only returned a careless nod to my greeting.

"Have you forgotten me, Phil?" she asked.

"No," said Phil, but no amount of pressing could induce him to name her, and she said, with a little sigh:

"Children's memories are so short. I suppose I could n't expect a little fellow like that to remember me at all."

"I dare say," I said cunningly, "if you were to recall your name to him he 'd remember where he met you."

"I dare say he would," she rejoined coolly, and then Phil remarked, apropos of nothing in particular, "How is your dog?"

She gave a little shriek of delight.

"He remembers me all the time, the darling!" she cried. "Phil, what is my name?"

"Miller—you told me your own self," he answered. "Did n't she, Ruddy? This is my friend Ruddy—you know him, too," he added, giving the meeting the familiar flavor of a reunion of three old friends long parted.

I may mention here that my name is Clifford James, but for reasons of his own Phil prefers to call me "Ruddy." I do not know his reasons. He is reticent about them, but knowing him as I do, I make no doubt he has reasons, for he is an eminently reasonable soul. I once asked him, as a favor, to explain, and after a long silence he murmured, "It seems like Ruddy to me," so I pressed him no further.

"Well, I 'm delighted to see you again, Phil," said the *Sketch* Girl.

"Ruddy wants awfully much to know your name," said Phil, and while I reddened confusedly the girl laughed—heartlessly, I thought.

"He does n't want your own name," went on this *enfant terrible*, "but your properly name. But why can't he call you Miller? He says you would n't like it, but you would n't mind, would you?"

"Well, Phil," she returned, "I like to keep that name for my very great friends, like yourself, you see."

"Will you be Ruddy's mother then, and sew on his—oh, oh, ugh! Ruddy—what you—holdin'—me—upsides down for?" For I had swept him off his feet and flung him across my shoulder in the endeavor to stem the tide of his indiscretions. When I set him right side up again the *Sketch* Girl was nodding good-by to me, and after an affectionate farewell to Phil, moved away.

Then I made a discovery. On the seat she had left the book she had been reading. With an entire lack of principle (and thanking my stars it was not a circulating-library book) I shamelessly opened it at the flyleaf. The Fates were kind. On the page, written in a bold hand, was the inscription: "Millicent Lynn, from her devoted D. A." My satisfaction was much qualified by the unmistakably masculine style of the handwriting, and I immediately conceived a violent dislike to D. A.

"Here, Phil," said I, "run after your friend with this book." But the moment he had trotted off I blamed myself for a fool. Had I kept that book, on our next meeting (it was bound to happen sooner or later) what an opening it would have been for me! I pictured myself drawing the book from my pocket and saying:

"Allow me to restore you your property, Miss Lynn—and let me make a confession. I read a page or two and became so absorbed——"

No, that would n't do. As the gift of D. A. the book must be trumpery, trashy, or better still, in bad taste, even unprincipled. I would delicately hint as much, and that would lead to a discussion on books which would reveal our mutual tastes (I felt sure they would be mutual), and I would offer to lend her books. "Books are such a bond," I would say, and she would hesitate, blush prettily, and invite me to call—with the books, and I would immediately have to go and buy some books, as the only ones I possessed were one shelf of battered law books, a pile of dilapidated paper-backed novels, Webster's dictionary, a Shakespeare, and my mother's Bible.

I was deep in these pleasant thoughts when I chanced to look up, and saw Phil and Miss Lynn again saying good-by. Phil is a lucky fellow, and yet see with what callous insensibility he wipes off the sweet salute of those lips with the back of his hand, and jauntily swings my stick with which he has been playing horses! At that moment, a dog, a lean, vicious, wolfish-looking creature, which, as Phil afterwards explained to me, could not have seen the notice on the gate about "omitting" dogs, leaped up from beneath a bush, and with snarling jaws sprang straight at the boy and his companion. The girl shrieked, and snatched at Phil's hands, while I started to run toward them, my heart in my mouth. But Phil, with admirable coolness, brandished his stick and faced the snarling brute.

"Get out!" he shouted energetically, and if there was a slight tremor in his tones it only showed the stoutness of his heart. And he actually hit the dog a sharp blow across the nose. The creature, cowardly like all such canaille of the streets, gave a surprised yelp of pain, turned tail, and fled. When I came up Phil was a little pale but very calm, and the girl was laughing hysterically and hugging him.

"You 're not hurt, Phil?" I cried anxiously, snatching him up.

"No," said Phil wriggling. "Don't squeeze me so hard."

"Did you *ever* see anything so brave?" cried the girl. "He stayed to face that raging brute simply to protect me. Were you afraid the wicked brute would hurt me if you went away, darling?" tenderly.

"No!" said Phil truthfully. "That was n't it."

"Oh!" she said, a little taken aback. "Then why did n't you run away?"

"'Cos," Phil explained gravely, "dogs can gen'ally run faster 'n little boys."

A moment's stunned silence followed, which was broken by a simultaneous peal of laughter from the *Sketch* Girl and myself. The hero walked away, very red and offended, and the girl called after him merrily:

"I insist on looking on you as my preserver, nevertheless, in spite of all modest disclaimers."

And Phil muttered, "I don't care—I did n't—so there!"

This was like Phil; not a timid child, or a foolhardily valiant one, he chose the cautious path, if possible, but if necessary, faced danger with no fuss or ostentation. I once asked him what he would choose as his profession, and after weighing the question he intimated that he was divided in his mind between a bishop and a car conductor.

"Not a soldier?" said I, surprised, for he had a regular little armory of weapons in his playroom, and a crimson helmet. He shook his head.

"Too dangerous!" he said gravely.

On the following Sunday Phil and I again went to the Gardens, and on the next after that Phil hinted that a change of pleasure ground might be pleasant. He said the beach at Manly was a very nice place on Sundays. But I had a purpose, of which, of course, he could suspect nothing, and on the third Sunday we again wended our way to the Gardens. On this occasion I had to bribe Phil with a promise of feeding the tortoise and the cassowary. Accordingly we had watched the slow meanderings of the tortoise in its hard-shell mail, which Phil rather aptly compared to the "lid of a 'normous oyster with hinges." It turned its flat head from side to side in a decided negative to Phil's offer of biscuits and chocolates, as it crept up and down the bare track it had worn in the grass with its in-turned toes. We had looked at the cassowary from a respectful distance, and fed the amber-eyed, red-billed, black swans with biscuits. They gave little plaintive squeaking cries which Phil said meant "Thank you, kind little boy!" but I was inclined to think they were like the daughters of the horse leech, crying "Give! Give!" Then we visited the bird house, and afterwards walked three times round the wishing tree, and Phil could by no means be prevailed upon to tell his wish, though he said it was something to do with his birthday and a motor car "that would go."

He allowed me three guesses, and when I hit upon the truth, he said in surprise, "Who told you?" and wanted to know my wish, but I was firm and would not confess. Then we strolled down to the ornamental water, and there my wish "came true." I found her sitting in the shade, gazing pensively at the throng of skimming yachts and gay little launches passing up and down, and at the same moment I found I had much underrated the perspicacity of my young friend. For, as I lifted my hat with a rather hypocritical air of surprise, Phil ran forward, crying:

"Oh, here you are *at last!* Ruddy an' me has been looking for you every Sunday for monfs—have n't we, Ruddy?"

Then, to cover the momentary awkwardness, I said: "Phil is anxious to thank you for the toy you so kindly sent him. He has started many letters to you——"

"Ruddy made me," interjected Phil, and I went on hurriedly:

"He has ruined two of my best pens and at least six sheets of my best notepaper, but as he did n't know your address, you see——"

I waited, but she only turned to Phil with a mischievous smile.

"Did you like the little toy dog, dear?"

"He was a very nice dog," replied Phil diplomatically.

"And you liked him?"

"I liked every bit of him except his tail."

"His tail!—but that was the best part of him, I thought," she cried, "it wagged so beautifully."

"It did n't wag when I had him," said Phil positively.

"Oh, it must have. Why should n't his tail wag?"

"He did n't have no tail to wag," said Phil, finally disposing of all argument.

"Broken!" cried the *Sketch* Girl. "What a pity! But never mind, I 'll send you another."

"Thank you, but I 'd rather have a motor car this time."

"And, Phil," I put in craftily, "you 'd better ask the address, as you 'll certainly want to write a letter of thanks."

"I 'll send it with my present, to *you*, Phil," said the *Sketch* Girl. Checkmate for me!

I sat down on the seat beside her, and in defiance of all park regulations I wrote with my cane in the newly turned mould of a flower bed, certain initials.

"I know those letters!" cried Phil officiously. "I learn them at the Kindergarter. That 's D for dog, and that 's A for—for something else."

"They don't please me at all," I said, gazing at them disparagingly. "Do they strike you as pleasing, Phil?"

"No," said Phil promptly; "you 've made D for dog very bad."

"And what do *you* think, Miss Lynn?"

I asked boldly, and had the satisfaction of seeing her start.

"I think," she said deliberately, "that over-curious people must not expect to be always pleased with their discoveries."

Soon after she left us, but she had pledged herself to write to Phil very soon. If I don't get the reading of that letter, and have a finger in the answering of it, may I never walk with Phil again!

I carried Phil home after tea, and as he was very tired, and it was dark, he did not feel his manhood outraged, but laid a sturdy arm about my neck, and worked his fingers well down inside my collar band and chatted sociably.

"I like you awfully, Ruddy," he said in a moment of expansiveness.

"Do you, old chap? That 's good!"

"Nearly 's well as I like Terry."

"As well as you like Millicent?" I asked for the pure pleasure of repeating the name, which I could do to Phil without fear of censure.

"Oh, better—but I love her dog."

By and by his little voice trailed off sleepily, his head drooped on my shoulder, and he only roused up once to say gently:

"I know you love me very much, Ruddy, but don't squeeze me so hard."

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH WE RECEIVE AND WRITE A LETTER

IT was Saturday, and a half-holiday, and Phil's mother had said he might "come over and play" with me. He arrived as I was finishing my solitary lunch, just in time for the last helping of apple pie. After finishing it off, and turning his emptied cup upside down on his chin to drain out the sugar, he slid down from his chair, played with the cat till she saw her opportunity and bolted through the window, counted all the tiles in the grate and the collective chair legs, and then said:

"What 'll we do now?"

"Oh, you just trot round a bit," said I. "I 'm going to have a smoke and a think."

"Are you going to smoke first and then think, or are you going to think first and smoke afterwards, or are you ——"

"Yes, yes, that 's just exactly what I am going to do, Philip," I interrupted firmly.

"Bet you can't guess what I 've got."

"No, I can't indeed."

"It 's a letter."

My indifference vanished, and as I stretched out my hand for it I cried so reproachfully:

"Why ever did n't you say so before?" that Phil looked up in surprise, and observed very justly:

"I need n't not have told you at all, if I did n't want. I 'll give you free guesses where I keep it."

At the same time his little brown hand closed tightly over the pocket of his jumper.

"In your pocket," said I instantly.

"Who told you?" he asked, disappointed.

"No one. I guessed. Come, give it me," I said impatiently.

"It 's my letter," he reminded me, and produced it very slowly, and I knew he was reflecting—and feeling rather injured—that I had broken the chief law of the game of guessing, the etiquette of which provides that in three shots one must, in courtesy, make at least two misses.

Yet when I opened the letter I found that aggravating girl had given as her address, G. P. O., City. I could fancy the mischievous glint in her eyes as she wrote it, knowing it would come into my hands.

I remained silent so long, and pulled at my pipe so hard, that at last Phil ventured:

"You 've thunk a long while, Ruddy."

The wistfulness in his tones pierced my

abstraction, and I shook myself together, for he had been very good and quiet.

"Well, yes," I said; "the fact is, I 'm really in a nasty hole, Phil."

"Where?" he cried, and walked twice round my chair, adding coldly, "Don't you know it 's wicked to tell stories?"

"I beg your pardon, old chap. I was speaking figuratively."

"Oh!" said Phil, in a tone implying that this put things in quite another light, and he was now satisfied.

"Come here," I went on, and when he was seated on my knee, "You 're a wise little chap, Phil," I said, "and I want your advice."

"Certainly," said Phil gravely, which is a grown-up little trick of his, picked up from some one. I sometimes talk wise nonsense to Phil, and far over his head, for the pleasure of seeing that look of serious attention and polite interest, and sometimes, because I am a lonely sort of a chap, and it pleases me to air my thoughts before one who will listen, and grasp the words, but not the significance.

"Now, Phil," said I, "what would you do if you had been rather badly burned, at a flame that had heat, but more brilliance than living warmth, I fear?"

"I 'd go to the doctor," said Phil promptly, "an' get him to put some griceline ointment on it."

"Ah, but," said I in perverse triumph at the hopelessness of my case, "supposing the hurt and the healing came from the same source, that the doctor and the flame were the same person?"

"That," said Phil, rather disdainfully, as he got down and walked away, "is n't true, of course. Some sauces do burn, like 'marter sauce, but a doctor could n't be a brazing flame, 'cos if he came near to make sick people well he 'd burn them up and make them worser, and then no one would have that doctor any more."

Phil's illuminating logic is always difficult to combat, so I remained silent a moment. Then I murmured, half to myself but eying Phil abstractedly, "All's fair in love and war. I wonder—there is an afternoon clearance at one-thirty. Would she consider it legitimate, or otherwise? Would she, touched by my devotion, my vigil on the post-office steps, graciously relent and smile, or would she flare up in wrath, freeze into cold dignity, and never look at me again?"

Said Phil, "What are you talking about?"

Said I, "The complex—the abstract—the

altogether inscrutable—the elusive and mutable—the riddle of the Sphinx—a woman's mind. Phil, what can we make of it? Advise me, dear friend, advise me."

Phil had been looking at me very intently during this inspired harangue, which, privately, I thought rather fine. Now he said bluntly:

"I don't know what you mean. I 'm going to play with the cat."

It served me right. My conscience smote me, and I sprang up.

"What do you say to a game of draughts?" I asked, and Phil became responsive. Phil rather fancies himself at draughts. Now, when I am in my right senses, and thinking what I am about, Phil always beats me badly, but to-day, being in a preoccupied mood and culpably absent-minded, I won two games in succession, swept Phil's poor little forces from the field, and was mechanically setting out the board again, when I glanced at my opponent. He was very flushed, and as he met my eye he tried to smile bravely, but his lower lip quivered ever so slightly as he said: "I 'm not quite becustomed to this way of playing draughts."

After that my blunders became quite frequent, but not so frequent as to arouse Phil's suspicions, which I had done once by willfully neglecting to take his king. To my surprise, Phil had pushed away the board, and refused to play any more because, he said, I was "not trying."

However, on this occasion he beat me hollow and his equanimity quite restored, he said with gracious patronage:

"It 's very nice for you to win sometimes, Ruddy."

"Phil," said I, "we must n't forget to answer our letter."

"My letter," corrected Phil with decision.

"Well, yes," I admitted; "but you 're going to let me help you to answer it, I hope."

"Oh, yes," he replied with cheerful indifference; "you can do it all, if you like, Ruddy. I don't mind."

"Oh, but that won't do at all. Millicent expects a letter from you. Thank her for that jolly boat she sent, and tell her it was the very thing you wanted."

"Oh, but it is n't," said Phil. "It was the motor car I wanted, but she said she had n't enough pennies. I 'm sorry for her, Ruddy. Could n't you give her some of your money out of the bank? She said she ——"

"She! She!" I interrupted testily, in my irritability reverting to a vulgarism of my nursery days. "She 's the cat's mother."

"*Is* she?" asked Phil, staring at me in such extreme surprise that I hurried on.

"Look here, would n't you like to answer that letter now?"

"I 'd rather go to the Zoo."

"Another time we 'll go. But now, what about the letter?"

Phil gave a wriggle.

"I don't know what to say."

"But I can tell you."

"Then that 'd be your letter. You don't know what I want to say."

On the condition that if the letter was written within the half-hour we should spend the rest of the day at the Zoo, Phil reluctantly consented.

I pushed a chair up to the table, placed two cushions on it, and there throned my scribe, put pen, ink, and paper before him, and, lighting my pipe, sat down to give help, encouragement, and instructions. I need not have troubled.

"I 'll show you how to begin," I said.

"I know how," returned Phil confidently. "I 've writ lots of letters to gran'pa."

"You write your address in the right-hand—"

"I know!" he said with a preliminary wriggle, and dipping his pen very deep.

"And when you 've done that, write 'Dear Millicent.'"

"I know," he returned discouragingly.

"Oh, very well," I said, and was silent, watching him; his small earnest face, his head on one side, his small pink tongue protruded, and quivering in sympathy with delicate up-strokes, and curling decisively at the corners, with firm down-strokes. He dipped very frequently and very deeply, dropped blots generously, breathed hard, spelled audibly and generally incorrectly, letter for letter, as he wrote, and after three attempts—Phil never gave up a thing once attempted—handed the finished effusion to me with an air of modest pride. This was his letter, minus phonetic spelling, which was managed rather ingeniously, and punctuated by myself:

"DEAR MILLICENT—

"How are you getting on? I hope you are quite well. I am quite well thank you. Ruddy is quite well. We are all quite well. How is your dog? I hope he is quite well. Thank you for the jolly boat. It is the very thing I wanted, but I'm sorry you have not got enough pennies for the motor car. I will give you some of mine when I break open my bank, and Ruddy will give you some of his. His bank is bigger than mine. It is that one near the post office, with the curly iron windows. It is a very nice one, but it is the kind what floats on to its side when you put it in the bath, but Ruddy will fix it one of these fine days. I send love and lots of kisses" (here followed the orthodox symbols), "and Ruddy send lots too from

"Your loving grandson,
"PHILIP"

Phil was watching me intently, and in the stress of my emotion I was obliged to lift the sheet of paper between my face and his earnest eyes. I held the paper so long thus, that Phil lost patience, and remarked:

"You must read very bad to take so long."

Even yet I could not trust my voice, and the paper shook.

"Is it good?" he asked with the complacent air of a favorite pupil waiting for his accustomed meed of praise.

"Yes," I said weakly, and my treacherous voice broke.

Phil jumped up.

"You 're laughing!" he said accusingly.

"No, no, I 'm not." With an effort I mastered my unseemly levity. "But see, old man, you must n't sign yourself like this."

"Oh, I always end my letters that way," said Phil airily.

"Yes, but then you were writing to your grandfather."

"That 's the way I write letters," he remarked, quite gently but with obstinate finality.

"But, hang it all, Miss Lynn is not—Great heavens!—your grandfather, boy!"

"Shall we go to the Zoo now?" As one who tactfully waives useless discussion.

"Oh, have it your own way," I said. "Stick it in an envelope and write the address."

He did so, licking the envelope flap extensively, and writing the address on a very uphill gradient. He carelessly brushed aside Millicent's note, and it fell to the floor. Thinking myself unobserved, I picked it up and slipped it into my pocket, and took Phil to the bathroom to wash his face and hands and brush his thick obstinate hair, and from behind a damp sponge he gave me an account, unavoidably disjointed, of how his mother's maid washed his face in moments of emergency, concluding the edifying recital with the perfectly reasonable remark that he "did n't mind" it being her "handkershif," but he 'd rather it was his own "lick."

We caught a car, and after counting the windows he spelled out the advertisements, as thus:

"O—b—a—n. What 's that spell, Ruddy?"

"Oban."

"What?"

"Oban, an advertisement for a tie fastener."

"What 's the man making that ugly face for? Has he just had a dose of eucalyptus?" (Eucalyptus is Phil's *bete noir.*)

"No! No! He can't fasten his tie right."

"I would n't make a face like that if I could n't fasten my tie."

"What would you do?"

"I 'd get my mother to fasten it for me. What 's the next one about? I—t. I know that word—it! It c—h—a—s—e—s——"

"Chases," I prompted. "It chases—d—i—r—t. What 's that spell, now? Come. It chases——"

"The cat," hazarded Phil in a flash of inspiration, his own experience probably suggesting the quarry. Then a little later, in a very audible voice, he asked:

"What 's that man pull up his trouser legs for when he sits down?"

"Hush!"

"What for hush? Why does he for, Ruddy?"

"He does n't want to bag 'em at the knees."

"What?"

"He does n't want them to get out of shape."

"Why?"

"Well, he does n't, that 's all. He likes them to be neat——"

"What?"

Phil interpolates "what" and "why" at intervals simply to gain time to formulate another question before the matter shall drop.

"Don't keep on saying 'what'," said I.

"Wha—beg your pardon?"

"Nor beg your pardon, either. It 's a habit you 've got."

"What?"

"A habit—there you go again."

"What's a habit?"

"What you 've got."

"Why?"

"Heaven knows—I don't!"

"Tell me a story, Ruddy."

"I can't! Not here. Hold on; I will, though, a short one." And I began in a low voice, conscious of two giggling girls opposite. "There was once a little boy——"

"What? I can't hear you." Phil thrust his face closer to mine.

"A little boy," I resumed hurriedly.

"Why can't you talk louder? Have you got a sore froat?"

"Who asked a tremendous lot of questions."

"How m——" began Phil, but I anticipated him.

"Seven hundred and forty-nine," I said quickly. "I'll tell you the rest another time."

Soon after I heard Phil, who insisted on buying the tickets with coppers borrowed from me, telling the conductor that we were going to the Zoo, a fact of which he informed all and sundry that came within range of his speaking voice. Then, to my surprise, he leaned over to a lady with a piece of white work in her hand, and asked sociably, "Is it the same or another piece?"

The lady started, and disclosed the features of our Spinster.

"*Why*, it is the little boy from the dentist's, is n't it?" she asked with a rather eager smile.

"Yes," replied Phil, adding hastily, "but we don't never kiss ladies on cram cars, do we Ruddy? You and me don't?"

"Never!" said I gravely, and Phil ran on sociably:

"I 've still got that tooth out," displaying a tiny gap at the corner of his small jaw.

He and the Spinster chatted amiably for a while, and then the latter pointed out one in a row of houses we were approaching, as her home. It bore a sign on the door which set forth "Miss Ellis, Pianoforte Teacher," and Phil, pointing it out, inquired its meaning.

"That, my dear," said the Spinster rather complacently, "is my occupation."

"Oh," said Phil! "I thought it was a brass plate. It looks like one what the doctor has on his gate."

As we alighted at our destination Phil remarked with affectionate pleasure:

"Here it is, in just the same old place," which, considering it was less than a fortnight since our last visit, was not very remarkable. There was the same old woman with her basket waiting on the curb; it seemed as though the very bags of peanuts were identical. We purchased largely of these, and then came the delight of the turnstiles, in which Phil took his place with supreme satisfaction. He always firmly resolves on going twice round in this device, and is unfailingly surprised to find himself, with apparently no volition on his own part, on the other side. First we visited the brown bear in his pit. It is the ambition of our lives to see bruin climb his pole, an ambition that has never been realized. Another animal in which Phil is profoundly interested is the llama, or what he calls the "spitting camel."

"What 's it say?" he asks, pointing to the notice board, though he knows perfectly well.

"Beware: this Animal Spits," say I very solemnly.

Phil looks delighted.

"Say it again," he urges.

"But you know it as well as I do."

"Yes—but say it again, please. I like to hear it."

Having done so, I hear him repeating softly:

"Beware—this animal spits—this animal spits—beware!"

For some reason it fascinates him, and as we move off he remarks:

"It 's a very rude animal, is n't it, Ruddy? But p'r'aps it has a nasty taste in its mouf like when I take eucalyptus."

At the monkey house we pause, to watch the weird half-human little wretches mouthing and chattering, and springing back and forth. Phil feeds them liberally with nuts, and we pass on. The huge good-natured elephant, laden with children, is perambulating slowly about the grounds. Phil is very interested, but declines a ride, as he thinks it might make him "elephant-sick."

Then comes the real business of the day — the feeding of the wild beasts—and long before there is any sign of the keeper, the iron rail in front of the cages is thronged with a jostling crowd of children, mothers, fathers, and nursemaids. Something of the following conversation goes on with more or less acrimony: "Now, Willie, keep close up, can't yer? Yer 'll lose yer plice, stupid!"

"'Ere, Georgie, Mary, Maggie, keep close to me, and Tom—where 's Tom? 'Ere, Tom, you keep alongside of me or I 'll skin yer."

"I say, Missus, I 'll trouble you not to let that boy push in like that. My boy was there 'fore 'e was."

"Ow! Was 'e? Reely! I s'pose 'e 'as as much right to see the animals fed as your boy."

"Mine was there first. 'Orace, you 'ang on to the rail tight an' don't let nobody push you off. Stick up for yer rights, I say."

"Or' right, mumma. You git out." The two boys jostle and elbow one another harmlessly. "I was 'ere first."

"You was n't!"

"I was."

"You lie."

"Look 'ere, ma'am, I 'll box that boy's ears, if 'e so much as lays a finger on my boy. Come 'ere, 'Orace, 'ere 's a better plice lower down. I would n't lower meself standin' by that scum, dear." Aside, with a shake, to Horace: "You little fool, wotjer let 'im push you out for?"

Chorus of children: "When 's the man with the meat coming? I can't see 'im. I can't see nothing."

"Oo! I 'm so squeezed 'ere. Can't yer let me see as well as you? Ma, Tommy 's standin' right in front of me. Will the man git right inside the cages?"

"Oo! ain't 'e fierce though?" and so on, and so on.

Two little street arabs arrive, breathless.

First Arab: "Aw! 't aint no good! Too many bloomin' kids. Chuck it, an' let 's go and snavel some peanuts from the monkey's cages."

Second Arab: "We 'll get in. Dodge under this fat bloke's arm."

They dodge, worm, and wriggle until, in spite of protests, they secure a place next the railings.

Chorus of women: "'Ere, 'oo 're yer pushin'? No, yer don't."

"You don't push by me that easy. 'Old on, Kitty and Johnny; take care o' little Bobbie, Mabel. Can you see all right there, Charlie? What! Lost yer place? Serve yer right for gapin' stupid! 'Ere, come in front o' me, the gentleman won't mind. My little boy, sir —

What? You 've as much right to see as 'im? Well, keep it, and much good may it do yer, but if you was lookin' for yer brothers, you 've made a mistake—the monkey 'ouse is lower down" (appreciative titters). "What yer cryin' for? No, you little fool, o' course 'e won't put 'is 'ead in the lion's mouth. This ain't a circus. Stop pushin' Mary, Alice. Wait till I get you 'ome, my girl, jest you wait," and so on.

Philip, enthroned on my shoulder, had his own store of question and comment, and so we whiled away some time until the keeper, with his barrow laden with rather grisly looking red joints, appeared, and after watching the great cats prowling, and sniffing or snarling over their meat, we threw biscuits to the little bears, who walked about on their hind legs and caught our offerings cleverly in mouths or paws, and whimpered and quarreled among themselves like a pack of greedy children. It was while waiting for the city-bound car that we saw the Elderly Gentleman. Philip saw him first, and accosted him in a friendly way. He turned sharp round, and fumbled for his spectacles, and having adjusted them, surveyed my young friend keenly over the top of them.

"Hello!" said Phil, after the manner of

your young colonial, without a shadow of disrespect, yet without a shade of awe.

"Hello, young man! God bless my soul! Is it—is it—now where have I seen this boy? Is it—I wonder—Jones' boy?" musingly.

"No, it is n't," said Phil; "it 's just me. Don't you remember *me?* At the dentist's, you know—having a tooth out?"

And having supplied all the data that could be reasonably expected of him, he waited confidently.

"God bless my soul, yes," cried the Elderly Gentleman, "and how are we, young sir?" He shook hands briskly.

"I 'm quite well, thank you. This is my friend, Ruddy. He was at the dentist's, too, that day. He said he guessed you were a peppery old chap."

"Philip!" I cried. "I assure you, sir," to the Elderly Gentleman, "our young friend has a lively imagination"— which was an injustice to Phil, his report having been quite a true one.

The Elderly Gentleman laughed very heartily, however, and begged me not to apologize.

"Children and fools, you know," he said jocosely, "and I put it to you, sir, if a visit to the dentist is not sufficient license for any amount of bad temper."

Having cordially agreed, we got into conversation, in the course of which I gave him my name.

"Not a son of Bob Lingard?"

"A nephew," said I.

"God bless my soul!" cried he. "Bob was a good friend of mine in the old days. My name is Wimple—William Wimple."

"Like Wee Willie Winkie," observed Phil to himself. Mr. Wimple, it seems, was Wimple, K.C., *the* Wimple of the famous case of Rex *v.* Doherty, which he carried through victoriously in the face of strong circumstantial evidence, and three apparently proved alibis. That was long before my time, but I, a struggling barrister, was glad to have the honor of shaking hands with the eminent lawyer, retired some years now and, it was reputed, rather wealthy. He, on his part, hinted vaguely at "putting things in my way," and finished up by an indefinite invitation to come and visit him at his home at Tambourine Bay, which I promised to do, without much prospect, I thought, of ever doing so. But Phil, on his general principle of always grasping the bull by the horns, and leaving nothing in doubt, clinched the matter in his own masterly style, there and then.

"When shall we come?" he asked.

"Eh!" said Mr. Wimple. "What 's that, young man? Who said anything about *your* coming?"

"Well," said Phil, rather offended, "I saw you first, you know."

"Quite right! Quite right!" agreed Mr. Wimple, and he named a day there and then, so that I had Philip to thank for any chances that might be coming my way. He shook hands with us both.

"Good day to you, Mr. Lingard," concluded our old "new" friend, "and good day to *you*, sir—good day, Humphrey."

It was a little idiosyncrasy on his part, we found, to forget names and bestow others of his own, and no amount of correction ever put him right. He always called Philip "Humphrey," and beyond once remarking to me that he wondered why the old man called him Humpty-Dumpty, Philip accepted his new name without any demur.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH PHILIP GOES A-GADDING

IT was Binks' "day out," and that excellent creature had sought and obtained permission to take Phil with her in search of recreation. The next day I had a full, true, and particular account of this "outing" from Phil, and I cannot do better than give this account in his own words, with my own unimportant interjections as a running commentary thereon. Phil, having subsided into the depths of my biggest armchair, with both hands in his breeches pockets, and his legs stuck straight out in front of him, and having tried unsuccessfully several times to turn heels over head, because his attitude seemed to invite such effort, consented at last to "sit up and behave," and tell his story.

"Well," he said, "Binks said, 'be here at twelve—twelve sharp, mind!' What 's twelve *sharp*, Ruddy?"

"The apex of time," said I, feeling quite "sharp" myself. These flashes come to a fellow at times.

"Well, I was here," continued Phil, "on the abex—what you said, you know—and would you believe it, she was n't even *dressed?*"

"Ah, Phil," said I, "your experience is beginning early, but they are all alike, these fair ladies. But how do you know that she was n't dressed?"

"'Cos I looked through the keyhole," he answered simply.

"Oh, Phil—at a lady in dishabille?"

"She was n't, Ruddy—it was her petticoat, and on her top part she ——"

"Hush! hush! I decline to hear any more. Let the mysteries of Binks' toilet be sacred for me. What happened next?"

"Well, after a' nawful time she came out, smelling so nice, Ruddy, and she had the dearest little rooster in her hat, an' she said, 'You 're all eyes, an' now what do you think of me?' an' I said, 'You smell berry nice, but you 've forgot to wash the flour off your nose, Binks,' and she said, quite cross-sounding, that I talked too much an' did I think I could fasten up the back of her blouse. I tried and tried, but it was such a silly blouse, Ruddy, with *hundreds* of buttons, and more buttons than buttonholes at the top and more buttonholes than buttons at the bottom, so at last she said she 'd manage for herself, 'cos boys' fingers were all thumbs, but I looked and looked at mine, an' they 're just the same as anybody else's."

Finally, it appeared, they got off and boarded a "cram car," which, in view of the overcrowding which goes on in our cars, is the well earned if unconsciously just name which Phil gives them.

"So we went along, an' we went along," proceeded Phil, "an' then we got off of the cram car, an' went down a funny little street, with houses all ezackly the same, an' then we were there."

"Where?" I asked.

"At Aunt 'Liza's. M'ria lives with Aunt Liza, and Gram'ma, an' Pa, but Pa was in bed 'cos he has to work all night. He gets up with the howls, and he goes to bed with the howls. Aunt Liza said so, but he must be a crybaby to be howling like that just for getting up and going to bed, must n't he? Why, I 'm only six, an' it 's years and years and *years* since I cried for going to bed. What are you laughing at?"

"Was I laughing? I did n't mean to. Go on."

Phil looked at me suspiciously, but proceeded.

"Gram'ma 's as deaf as a postman. What

makes postmen deaf? Their loud whistles, I 'spect. Still, I 'd love a postman whistle, Ruddy. Do you think you could buy me one? I 'd only blow very softly if you did."

"Perhaps, but get on now."

"Well, Gram'ma—she 's silly, too, you know. She had a kind of a tin crumpet-thing in her lap, and she tried to blow it with her ears."

"With her ears?"

"Yes. I would have just loved to blow it. It was such a dear little crumpet, an' I said I 'd show her how, but Binks said not to touch it. 'cos it was for hearing, not for blowing, but, course you could n't hear it, if nobody blowed it, could you? But every time anybody said a word Gram'ma snatched up the little crumpet and stuck it in her ears, one after the other, and said: 'That 's it—mumble, mumble, mumble. You would n't dare say it to my face, 'cos of my money, but I 'll take care of that.'"

"What a dear old lady!"

"Not very," admitted Phil, dispassionately; "when we first got there she said to Binks, 'Gadding again, Emma Binks, an' does that child b'long to the young feller you do for?' An' Binks said just like this, Ruddy—here Phil elevated his small nose and screwed up his lips superciliously—'the *gentleman* what I keeps house for, is a *battledore.*' I think she said battledore."

"Bachelor, perhaps," said I, trying to hide my mirth by pulling fiercely at my pipe.

"Yes," said Phil, "that was it, an' then Gram'ma said (an' she kind of snorted), 'More shame for him, then, keepin' some girl out of a home.' Why don't you let the girl go home, if she wants to, Ruddy?"

"She won't come home, Phil, charm I ever so wisely," said I. "But go on!"

"Then Gram'ma said to me, 'Come here, little boy; would you like to kiss an ugly old woman?' and I said, 'No, thank you,' 'cos I would n't, you know, Ruddy, and she asked me. But Binks said, 'Mercy sakes!' an' Aunt Liza said, 'An' Gram'ma's that touchy!' And M'ria said, 'Oh, lor!' and began to laugh."

"And what did Gram'ma say?"

"She said, 'Go it! Go it! Waitin' till I 'm dead an' gone to laugh over my poor old bones, an' dance on my grave, too. But you shan't get my money in a hurry. I 'm sittin' tight on that." So I went up to her an' said, 'Do you sit on it all the time? It must feel very hard sometimes, does n't it? An' what do you do when you go to bed?' But Binks made me come away, an' said, 'Gram'ma was too much for flesh and blood.' What 's flesh and blood mean?"

"Well, and what next?" said I successfully evading the point.

"Then M'ria took Gram'ma a bowl of soup, an' she 'set it all down poor M'ria's blue dress, and it was 1*s.* $8\frac{3}{4}$*d.* at the sales, an' worth every penny of half-a-crown. M'ria cried, an' Gram'ma laughed in a horrid kind of way, an' said, 'Dear me, what a sad axibent. What a *sad* axibent, but pride must have a fall, my girl,' but it was n't an axibent at all. She did it on purpose, an' I told Binks, an' she said, 'Hush, Sharp eyes!' An' then Binks an' Aunt Liza begged M'ria to put on another dress, 'cos Binks said she would look just like a bell in it, an' I wanted to see her looking like a bell, so I begged her, too, so she did, but she did n't look a bit like a bell, after all. After that we all had a smack."

"A what?"

"A smack; you know, that 's what Binks says; it means a bit of bread an' cheese an' beer."

"You had no beer, I should hope."

"Yes, I did—*hot* beer."

"Hot or cold," said I indignantly, "Binks ought to have known better than to give a child beer."

"You've often given me some, you know the kind that fizzles up at the back of your nose."

"Oh! ah! *hop* beer. That 's all right."

"I *said* hot beer," said Phil with dignity, "and after we 'd finished—I had the last bit of cheese, 'cos I told them I was the visitor—M'ria's feller came in."

"Ye gods! Maria's what?"

"Her feller! She told Binks that she 'd been 'going with' him so long she s'posed she 'd 'go the whole way to church this time.' *She* told me he was her 'feller.'"

"Phil, Phil," said I, shaking my head, "what company have you been keeping? Evil communications——"

"Yes, and his name 's H'alf," said Phil innocently, "and she an' H'alf were going for a walk, an' M'ria said I could come, but H'alf said, 'Who wants a gooseberry?' and I said, 'I do, please,' an' then they all laughed, an' Gram'ma woke up, an' said, 'Cackle! Cackle! Cackle!' but nobody gave me a gooseberry after all."

Phil drew a nail and a piece of string from his pocket and remarked in a detached way: "I did n't go with them 'cos Binks said better not, and Aunt Liza, she said, 'All little picshers have long ears,' but that 's not true, 'cos I 've seen hundreds of picshers, an' none of them have ears at all. Have yours?"

"Well, I don't know," I said. "You know it is said that walls have ears, and as pictures hang on walls they might possibly ——" But there I stopped, ashamed of my levity in the face of Phil's innocence, and continued, "Go on!"

"That 's all," said Phil, clinking his nail monotonously against the fender rail. "Look! this nail is a fish I 've caught, an'——"

"But," I interrupted, "what happened next?"

"Nothing did n't happen at all. We just sat and sat and sat, until Binks said time to go home. This fish pulls like anything."

"Come," I persisted. "Something else must have occurred."

"What 's 'occurred' mean?"

"Well, for instance, poor old Granny—did n't she say some more kind things?"

"She was n't 'a poor old' at all. She was a horrid, cross old skinned something—Binks said so." He returned to his fishing, hanging head down over the chair-arm.

"Well," said I impatiently.

"What?" said he, jerking at his line.

"Tell me about Gram'ma!"

With a sigh he sat up, returning the nail and string to his pocket. He sat silent for a moment with knit brows. Then, "Something happened," he said slowly. "Gram'ma fell off her chair on to the stove."

"Good Heavens!" I said "A judgment. Then, I suppose, there was a great commotion."

"A what?"

"Commotion—a fuss. Binks and Aunt Liza rushed, I suppose."

"No," he returned coldly; "they did n't do nothing. They went on talking, only Binks said, 'Serve her right,' an' I said so too, and we did n't take a bit of notice."

"Monsters!" said I, who had my suspicions. "And was n't poor Gram'ma burned?"

"Just a little—at the edges," he said. "An' bime-by M'ria picked her up, an' put her in her chair again."

"But M'ria was out with—with H'alf?"

For a moment Phil looked a bit flurried.

"Yes, but she—she came back when she heard Gram'ma screaming."

"*Phil!*" said I, in a warning voice.

"What!" said he, brazening it out.

"Look me in the eye, Phil."

He did so, steadily enough, but the pink began to creep up and deepen in his round cheeks.

"You 've been telling fibs, Phil," said I gravely.

"Yes," he confessed in a small voice, "just that part about Gram'ma falling on the stove."

"Oh, Phil! Why did you tell me fibs?"

"You—you made me, Ruddy," Phil's voice shook slightly. "I told you that was all, but you keeped asking and asking what happened, what never happened at all, and so—so—" he gulped, and suddenly a big tear splashed on to his little brown fist, and I, recognizing justice in his defense, jumped up and cried:

"Let 's play burning houses, Phil."

"Let 's," cried Phil, his tears banished for that occasion.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH PHIL MAKES A NEW FRIEND

PHILIP has found a new friend. I am not quite happy about it. I feel that this means a rupture in our pleasant relationship, that this new friend will thrust in, and upset the perfect understanding that Phil and I have enjoyed, with claims that will clash with my claims on Phil's time and attention, with demands, caprices, and exactions innumerable. I have confided my fears to Philip, but he very kindly says, No! that he will always like me best, and furthermore he points out that, owing to the many engagements of his new friend, there will be still many hours which he proposes to devote to me. Of course it will be gathered that this new friend is a woman, a slight thing, pretty if you will, quite amazingly pretty in fact, with a thick cloud of ruddy hair, and shell-pink ears, and unabashed blue eyes. Her name is Olivia Mary Harland, and her age is six years. She is a fellow-student with Philip at the "Kindergarter," and is possessed of some real or fancied superiority over him, inasmuch as she is up to "big pig" while he is still struggling with "fat cat."

Why this should constitute a claim to superiority I know not, but she is very arrogant indeed about it, and Philip himself humbly admits her claim, except when he is goaded too far, when he very justly says, "A cat is better than a pig, because you can never take a pig to bed with you."

On Saturday afternoons now, she and Philip play together and I have to dig my garden, and mow my pocket-handkerchief lawn, without my young friend's help. It makes me very sad. Philip was so industrious and helpful. Once, when he was weeding, he pulled up all my young asters, but accidents like that might happen to any gardener, and I never told him. Meeting Phil in the street, I confessed my loneliness to him, and he volunteered to bring Olivia Mary to see me. I was not very jolly about it, but as it seemed he would n't come without her, I consented. He was as good as his word, and the next Saturday they both turned up. I was first made aware of their approach by hearing a high-pitched, incisive, feminine voice: "I 'm going to open the gate, Phil. Don't you do it. Yes, I do know how. Mother says it's ladies first."

Then Philip's voice: "You 're not a lady—you 're just a little girl. I want to open the gate my own self. You 're littler 'n me."

"I 'm in pig—but——"

It was the first I had heard of the wretched porker, but it was not to be the last. It silenced Phil, and ended the squabble. I saw a little blue-sleeved arm slipped through the rails. The latch clicked, and two small figures came hurrying up the path, the feminine in advance, a slim, graceful figure in a blue frock, with an enormous bow of blue ribbon tied to one side of a mass of short bright hair. She wore no hat, had elbow sleeves, and a square-cut low neck, and long legs, with open-work white socks and white shoes to inadequately clothe them. I was in my dining room, and without any formality she swept in upon me, Phil bringing up the rear. In one sweeping, disdainful, comprehensive glance she seemed to me to find out the weak spots in my room, which Philip and I had ignored or never noticed, and I was suddenly horribly conscious of the worn place in my linoleum which Phil and I has so often absently tripped over, of the sagging of one lace curtain which Phil had torn from the rings when hiding one day, of the confusion of pipes, old tobacco tins and match boxes and dusty odds and ends on the mantel-shelf. That is the worst of a woman. Phil and I had been under no delusion concerning this room of mine, but it had always seemed to us a jolly sort of place, cozy, cheery, substantial, but now under the appraising eye of this woman it became small and dusty and shabby, and I was hoping she had not noticed the very large rent in the tablecloth which was partially concealed by a particularly hideous blue and green vase, a gift from Philip. All this took place in the moment it took for her to come forward.

"How do you do?" said I, holding out my hand. "You are Phil's little friend?"

"I 'm Olivia Mary Harland," she returned in clear, high tones. "Sometimes I 'm his friend and sometimes I 'm not. What 's them?"

An imperious small finger indicated a sheaf of pipe-spills in a cracked vase.

"Those," said I, "are for lighting my pipe."

"I made them," put in Phil, proudly. "I 'll show you how to make some for your daddy."

"My father," observed Olivia Mary, distinctly and chillingly, "lights his pipes with real matches out of a *silver* match box."

Phil and I glanced at each other, feeling depressed. Then I felt a comforting small hand in mine, and heard Phil's voice whispering, "Never mind, Ruddy; I 'll buy *you* a silver match box."

"Thank you, old man," I said, much cheered.

Then followed a depressed silence, Phil and I and Olivia Mary gazing solemnly at each other, all of us shy and self-conscious. As usual, the woman's self-possession asserted itself first. She slipped down from the chair where she had been sitting, one slim leg swinging and the other doubled under her.

"We'd better be going now, better n't we, Phil?" she said.

"No, no!" I said, my latent hospitality aroused. "If you 're going so soon, what was the use of coming?"

"Phil made me," she answered succinctly.

"Oh!" I rejoined weakly.

"We 'll have to bemuse her, Ruddy," Phil whispered audibly. "I said if she came we 'd bemuse her, an' I had to give her the bit of choc. I had saved for you."

I looked helpless. Phil and I could amuse ourselves in a thousand ways, but would this small fine lady count it amusement to mow my small square of grass, to poke about under the dusty bushes for hen's nests we never found, to rearrange the tools, that is, one rake, one Dutch hoe, one chipped spade, and a hammer, and kindred enjoyments which made a busy, happy afternoon for Phil and me? Then I was conscious of Phil nodding at me, his chubby face screwed up, and his smooth forehead puckered into a very meaning frown.

"In the cupboard!" he breathed.

"Eh?" I said, mystified.

"You know!" nodding still more mysteriously, over my head.

"I don't, I'm sure," for Phil was very direct in his methods as a rule.

"Pink sugar," he prompted, and a light broke in on me.

"Oh, ah, yes!" I sprang up, and going to the cupboard produced a tin of sweet biscuits, special favorites of Phil's. As the right-of-way to a child's heart lies through its stomach, and sugar biscuits level all differences, we were soon all sociability, biscuit crumbs, and pink sugar.

"Now, what 'll we do?" asked Phil, when we were all surfeited, a crumb of pink sugar on the tip of his small nose not detracting from the beatitude of his expression.

"What?" said I, conscious of four very sticky little paws, and two equally sticky little faces pressing close to me.

"Let 's swing in the hammock," suggested Phil.

"Let 's," said I.

Accordingly, after I 'd taken them to the bathroom and washed hands and faces—rather a pleasant operation, I thought, as I rubbed the soft pink, damp cheeks with a clean towel and dried dimpled hands, finger by finger—we repaired to the back porch. We all tumbled into the old hammock with much laughter and settling down, and rather a wordy wrangle between Phil and Olivia Mary as to whose fault it was they both kept sliding down into the middle and on top of me, a discussion in which I very discreetly took no part, having a very good idea as to who was to blame. My Lady cut short this argument with a very decided:

"I 'm the visitor—well," a quaint habit she had of ending her sentences. She had a rather engaging stammer, too, which in moments of excitement or urgency was apt to trip her up, and the blood would fly into her face and she would stamp her small foot with annoyance. We swung industriously for a time, but after having rescued both children several times, by frantic grabs, from pitching out head first, first on one side and then the other, I found the thing getting on my nerves, so I helped them out and suggested a game. Instantly the fun-sprites danced into Phil's bright eyes.

"Hidy-go-seek, and don't look in the bathroom," he cried eagerly, and was off. So we played for a while, but Olivia Mary retired so often with an offended air, saying "It is n't fair," or "I won't play any more," or "I 'm not speaking to you," that Phil and I became bewildered, and a little damped in spirits. We were not, to use Phil's expression, "becustomed" to playing that way, having always played with a degree of heartiness and good-fellowship. I suggested a rest, and we all sat down to grow cool again.

"These are not my b-best shoes," remarked Olivia Mary. (Phil called her "Livy," but to me she was always so tremendous, nothing but her full title seemed to do her justice.) She regarded her slim crossed ankles with complacency.

"Are n't they?" said I coolly.

"I 've got white k-kid one for S-Sunday with free straps," she continued, "an'—an' s-s-silk s-socks."

"That 's nothing," said I, refusing to be impressed, for the remembrance of Phil's slighted pipe-lights rankled, and I felt it to be my turn. She looked at me, amazed.

"I 've got a white silk frock with 's-sertion let in for S-Sunday."

"I know a little girl," said I mendaciously, "who wears a white silk frock every day."

"Not to school?" she breathed, incredulous.

I was enjoying myself, and getting some of my own back.

"Yes, "I nodded. "All the time—always."

"With 's-sertion let in—but?"

"All over it," I said recklessly, quite ignorant as to what she referred, and elated with her evident empressement I overreached myself by adding, "and it has beautiful bows and flounces all over it, too."

"Then that little girl must look very old-fashion. They are not worn now," said this amazing child, with the air of supercilious finality and contempt with which the fashionable dame refuses to consider last season's hat. I was crushed and silenced.

Phil, very properly having grown tired of this inane conversation, begged for a story, and for the first time I saw the child wake up in Olivia Mary, for two very engaging dimples appeared in her pink cheeks, and she climbed on to my knee at once. Phil's face fell, for he had been preparing to take his usual seat, and he gazed at the interloper very hard. Phil is a gentleman, but he has a lively sense of his rights, and I do not know what might have happened had I not very hastily made room for him also. I told them stories for half an hour, and discovered in this strange, hard little piece of porcelain femininity an unexpected streak of the softer attributes of her sex. For having hit on the story of David and Goliath, a favorite with Phil, and been at pains to describe with much graphic detail the timely demise of the giant, a recital which always gives Phil unholy satisfaction, my feminine auditor suddenly startled us both by bursting into roars and wails of grief, burying her pink cheeks against my shoulder. Phil, much taken aback, misunderstood her entirely. "Don't cry, Livy dear," he said consolingly. "It was only horrid old G'liath that was killed—he did n't hurt dear little David a bit, did he, Ruddy? David hit him *bang* on the temper with a little weeny stone, and the great, big, ugly old giant dropped down killed—dead—you tell her, Ruddy."

But Olivia Mary was understood to gurgle between her sobs that "David was a nasty cruel little boy"—"and the p-p-poor giant."

Then she suddenly dried her eyes on my coat sleeve, sat up with a sniff, and said, "Tell another."

I was sore put to it to find a non-harrowing subject, for the wells of her sympathy flowed afresh very readily, but even in this commendable softness she showed a queer feminine perversity, for it was the wolf that climbed down the chimney, and not the persecuted pig that got her sympathy, while the pathos of poor abandoned Joseph in the pit, over which Phil had been known to wink his bright eyes very hard, left her cold, while she wept over the slaughter of the kid in the blood of which the gay coat had been dipped. It was then, in search of a sufficiently innocuous and unmoving tale, that I discovered Olivia Mary's *raison d'etre*, why a kind Providence had suffered her to grow and thrive and come between me and Phil, and inflict herself upon me that particular afternoon—all means working to an end.

For having concluded the story of the loaves and fishes, and calculated to Phil's satisfaction the amount of crumbs left over, by giving him a quite unwarranted estimate of the size of the seven baskets, Olivia Mary remarked rather disparagingly and quite casually, just as though it were not the most precious and important utterance that had fallen from her remarkably pretty mouth since she was born:

"That 's not the way M-miss Lynn tells it."

"Miss Lynn," I cried, and clutched her to me so violently that she cried sharply:

"Don't; you 'll crush my frock."

"Miss Lynn," I repeated. "What do you know about Miss Lynn?"

"I—she 's my Sunday school teacher. Not my properly one—that 's Miss Davis. Do you you know her?"

"Yes," said I, thinking how deliciously demure Millicent must look trying to banish the fun sprites from her brown eyes in the midst of her little class.

"Is n't she sweet?" in quite a grown-up tone.

"She is indeed!"

"I love her, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," I said boldly.

"She looks so l-lovely in that gray frock an' her blue hat."

"I like her in white," I said dreamily, "or pink, I think, pale pink, and her big hat turned up at the side with little rosebud things."

"S-she has n't g-got a hat like that."

"She has indeed," I said positively. "I saw her wearing it. Phil will corroborate me."

"No, I won't," said Phil instantly, and on principle.

"Won't she look pretty being married on Wednesday?" continued Olivia Mary with enthusiasm.

"Married!" I gasped. "On Wednesday?" and started so violently that I nearly unseated both children, who clutched at me wildly and I at them.

"You did it on purpose," said Phil reproachfully, but I heeded him not.

"Tell me, I said feebly to Olivia Mary, "who is she going to marry?"

"Somebody she calls D. A.," she said, and I groaned inwardly. The hated D. A. come to light at last!

"He 's the gentleman what t-taps the desk for the hymns," she explained, adding disparagingly, "He is n't very p-pretty, you know. Nearly all his hair's wore off an' his teeths s-stick out like 'at," clenching a set of pearls on a red under-lip by way of illustration.

My dainty Millicent to marry a monster of this type! I felt hot under the collar, and my little tormentor, looking at me critically, remarked:

"Would n't you like to marry her?"

"Yes," I confessed abjectly.

"Why d-don't you then? You 're not very pretty either, but you 're n-nicer than him."

"Thank you, I said, "but it looks as if Miss Lynn likes him better, you know."

"I don't think Miss L-lynn l-likes him at all."

A light—a blessed light—broke in upon me, and in my huge relief I hugged Olivia Mary so hard that she wriggled off my knee, and re-settled her hair ribbon with dignity.

"Philip," said I severely, "you really ought to go to Sunday school. If your mother has not the time to take you, I 'll take you along to-morrow."

Considering I had always been the most strenuous opponent of the Sunday-school idea, it was no wonder that Phil looked surprised at such a very sudden right-about-face on my part. He protested loudly—he would not go; his father had promised to take him out to La Perouse, to see the Aborginals and the Snake Charmer. What inducement could I offer in the face of such superior attractions? When the children were leaving I whispered to Phil: "She 's very nice, Phil. You must bring her again some day—but not for a long time."

The next afternoon I strolled along toward the Sunday school, patronized—literally, for she patronized everything—by Olivia Mary. On second thoughts I was glad to be alone, for Phil, dear fellow as he is, has a fatal habit of distracting the attention of fair ladies from myself. I 've taxed him with it, but he says he can't help it—they *will* kiss *him*—and I believe him, but the fact remains. The school was being dismissed as I came within sight of the gates, and little boys and girls were pouring forth in a spreading stream, as I have seen young chicks stream out of the doors of an incubator at feed time. Yes, and there she was, dressed as if, sweet soul, she knew my preference, and I liked to think so, in the pink frock and big hat with the rosebud things. She was surrounded by little girls, tripping along with that little hoppety-skip peculiar to the gait of little girls, and never to little boys, who simply run blunderingly like young puppies. Some were clinging to each hand, at which I felt aggrieved, as, when, with a fine air of nonchalance I stopped and raised my hat, she had not a hand to offer me. The following conversation ensued:

I: "Good afternoon!"

She: "Good afternoon!"

I: "Glorious weather!"

She: "Isn't it?" (Pause.)

I: "This your little flock?"

She: "Yes."

I: "Seen our mutual friend lately?"

She: "No!"

I: "He's very fit."

She: "Give him my love, will you?"

I: "I will."

She: "Good-by."

I: "Good-by."

Then I passed on, only wishing I had the effrontery to follow and find out where she lived. Still, I had seen her, had had converse with her—something on which to chew the cud of sweet reflection. And through the remainder of my stroll, and all that evening, as I sat, solitary, smoking on the veranda, I rehearsed our conversation. "Good afternoon!—Good afternoon!—Glorious weather!—Is n't it?—This your little flock?—Yes!—Seen our mutual friend lately?—No!—He 's very fit!—Give him my love, will you?—I will.—Good-by!—Good-by!"

Again and again I turned these words over in my mind, returning to them as a boy squeezes a sucked orange, surprising fresh drops of sweetness out of its flacid rind, with every lingering pressure, until gradually I eliminated my own inane remarks, and the conversation ran thus in the sweetest of voices: "Good afternoon. Is n't it? Yes. No. Give him my love, will you? Good-by!"

Few enough, these words, but it is surprising what meaning and sweetness can be read into the monosyllables "Yes" and "No" when delivered from fresh red lips, with a little upward curl of sweet mockery at the corners—and the way she said that word "love," lingering deliciously on its sweetness. Bear with my sentimental meandering. I was in love, for the first time—and with Millicent Lynn! And then suddenly the whole episode seemed empty, bald, and meaningless, most unsatisfactory, and the bottom dropped out of my content. Why had I been such a fool? Why, when I had the chance, had I not pressed my advantage? No doubt she resented my stopping her at all, or why had she been so frigid and short? "Yes"—"No"—almost tantamount to saying politely I was taking a liberty. I went to bed, thoroughly chilled and dissatisfied.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH WE IMPROVE OUR ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN

A FEW more days brought round our appointment to call on the Elderly Gentleman, and I told Phil to call for me at two-thirty. He suggested that he should come to lunch "to save time," but I negatived that, as I had a letter to write before going out. At one-thirty however, he turned up, looking very fetching in a white duck suit, heather-mixture stockings and brown boots, bare-kneed and bare-headed, his thick light hair neatly brushed and parted.

"I'm ready," he announced. "Come on."

"Well, I'm not!" I said, adding unmannerly, "Why did you come so early?"

"Mummy said to run along—I bovered too much asting about the time. I've had my lunch though—egg and b'ren-butter. What d' you have?"

"I don't know—I forget. Run into the kitchen now and help Mrs. Binks."

Three times in twenty minutes he popped his fair head in at the door, to say "I'm here still. Is n't it time yet?"

Finally he got me off half an hour too early, and we had to wait for the Lane Cove Ferry, which time Phil beguiled by counting the boards of the wharf, and the masts of the shipping, and in spelling out what advertisements met his eye. Then I gave him a penny for a penny-in-the-slot machine, and to his immense surprise he received back a pencil with a rubber end, instead of the chocolate he expected.

"How did the choc'lit turn into the pencil?" he asked.

"Oh, it did n't. There was no chocolate in that machine."

"But I always get chocs from it."

"From what?"

"From the—the chemine. What are you laughing at? You said it."

Just then, with puffing and splashing, the little snub-nosed Lane Cove boat sidled alongside the wharf, and we went on board. How the blue water danced and sparkled as we cut our way through it, and churned across the broad stretch of harbor, turning up the lovely estuary with its steep cliffy banks, thickly wooded with red-stemmed feathery-foliaged gum trees. At Tambourine we alighted, and Phil danced along beside me, his hand in mine, or ran ahead, calling to me to come on, he'd be there first. So we mounted the picturesque slope which led upward from the tiny jetty. Mr. Wimple's house was a delightful old-fashioned place in the midst of neat lawns and shrubberies. Phil rang the bell, and I had great difficulty in restraining him from ringing again before an elderly woman in black opened the door to us.

"Hello," he said sociably, "is your father in?—but he must be 'cos he said to come to-day, did n't he, Ruddy?"

I handed my card to the amused but slightly bewildered maid, and we were shown into Mr. Wimple's study, where that gentleman in smoking cap and slippers sat reading. He shook hands with us both. "So you've brought your nephew," he said. "Well, I'm very glad to see you both."

"Philip is not my nephew," I remarked, smiling, "but a great friend of mine only."

"I see—I see. Well, sit down, sir, and you, Humphrey, take that chair."

"My name is Philip," explained Phil patiently.

"Yes, yes, of course. And how are you, Philip?"

"Quite well, thank you. I saw your mother when I came in. Where is she now?"

"God bless my soul!" cried Mr. Wimple,

startled. "My mother? Dear soul! In heaven these twenty years."

Phil looked skeptical, but made no comment on this, merely remarking: "That's a funny cap you've got on. My father says gentlemans don't wear hats in the house, but I 'spect it does n't matter about old ones."

We had a long chat while Phil sat swinging his legs, yawning and sighing. His host had given him a book, but, as I found out later, had, absent-mindedly, given one with no pictures. It was, therefore, an obvious relief when, with a preliminary tap at the door, a rosy plump old lady in black silk and white scarf came in with a tea tray in her hands.

"Tea, at last!" cried Phil with a relieved sigh. "I was wondering how long."

In two bounds he was over at the old lady's side.

"I'll pass the sugar and hand round the little cakes—oh! there are n't any," he said after a hasty inspection.

But there were cakes following, and hot scones and golden-brown gingerbread—quite a feast, and as Phil is a normal boy, with a boy's normal appetite, which sometimes seems quite abnormal, he showed his delight by clapping his hands and crying "Hurray!" and the old lady smiled.

This was Mrs. Brett, Mr. Wimple's housekeeper; as he explained when he introduced us, in a loud voice, as Mrs. Brett was deaf.

"Will you not stay and pour tea for us, Mrs. Brett?" asked our host, adding, "Mrs. Brett has been in this house many years. How long is it you have been at 'Warialda,' Mrs. Brett?"

Mrs. Brett replied with a beaming smile and a nod:

"Four lumps, of course, sir. I never forget."

"Deaf, poor soul!" said Mr. Wimple. "Now, Humphrey, draw up your chair, my boy."

"He's forgot again, Ruddy," whispered Phil to me, and I whispered back hurriedly:

"Yes—yes—never mind!"

"And what does the young gentleman take?" asked Mrs. Brett, and we all looked at Phil.

"Phil," said I, "Mrs. Brett is speaking to you."

"Oh!" said Phil. "What?—I mean, I beg y' pardon!"

"I said what will the young gentleman take?"

"I don't know—where is he?" said Phil innocently, and when things had been explained he said he took the "color of tea," and might he put the sugar in himself? After tea, at the suggestion of Mrs. Brett, Phil went, rather unwillingly, to wash his hands, and remained away a good half-hour. They returned together, Phil's pocket bulging, and a bunch of gay flowers, very tightly arranged and with very short stalks, in his hand.

"Ha!" said Mr. Wimple. "Who's been picking my flowers?"

"One of your mothers told me I could," said Phil rather doubtfully. "They're for poor little Livy. I ast her to come, but her mother would n't let her come," for which I was thankful, as I had known nothing of it.

"A fine little fellow, your little boy, sir," said Mrs. Brett to me.

"Oh, he's not my boy," I endeavored to explain, but she nodded and said she "could see that—as like as two peas, you are, and that proud of his daddy!"

"His nephew, Mrs. Brett," shouted Mr. Wimple to her, adding, with a chuckle, "Awkward mistakes these deaf folks make."

I did n't bother to explain, reflecting, after all, that it was rather a pleasant thing to be thought Phil's father, or even his uncle. We left soon after, and I felt very well content with my world. Mr. Wimple had definitely promised me a helping hand; a great many opportunities of recommending clients came in his way, and in my sanguine mood my future seemed assured. In natural sequence my thoughts flew to Millicent Lynn, and even the thought of the hated initials could not depress me. We ran up to my office for some papers I wanted, and though it is quicker for me to take the stairs three steps at a bound than to wait for the lift, Phil loves the lift so much that we waited. He rang the bell in a continuous peal till the lift came rushing down, and the lift-man, who is of a crabbed disposition, dashed the door open fiercely, all agog to give some one a piece of his mind, but when he saw Phil's friendly smile and heard his cheerful greeting, he swallowed his wrath.

"What makes it go up?" said Phil to him.

"'Idrollick pressure," said the man glibly.

"Oh," said Phil, "does the high-rollick pressure make it come down too?"

"I s'pose so—it's the—er—water power, you see."

"Who's pulling the ropes at the top?" asked Phil.

"Wot ropes?"

"To make us go up to the high-rollick pressure."

"Why, it's this way, y'see—the water does the trick."

"Why?"

"Well, y' see—that's the use of it."

"How?"

"Oh, I dunno," said the man testily, and stopped the lift with a jerk and flung the door back.

"How many times a day do you go up?" asked Phil, as he stepped out.

"Oh, 'undreds!"

"You are lucky, and how many——"

But the door was banged to, and the lift was rising to the floor above us.

"Oh," said Phil, regretfully, "I did want to ask him how many peoples went in his lift. Why do they call it a lift, Ruddy?"

"Because it lifts us up, I suppose."

"Daddy calls it a harder name than that—a—a evelator, that's it! Why does he, Ruddy—and why don't you?"

"Oh, bother!" said I, and at that moment the boy I had given five shillings to, to play at being my office boy for the afternoon, met me and informed me that a lady was waiting for me, and then made a horrible face at Phil. A lady! My heart leaped. But the lady who rose from one of my office chairs to greet me was small and elderly, and it was only when Phil ran forward in his friendly way that I recognized the little Spinster. I could see she was rather nervous, so I told Phil to run out and talk to the office boy, on the landing.

"No, thank you, Ruddy. I'd rather stay with you and this lady," he said composedly. "She's *my* friend too."

But I persuaded him, and he held out his little bunch of rather wilted flowers to Miss Ellis.

"Thank you, my dear," said the Spinster, gratified. "It is very kind of you to give me your flowers."

"Oh, I'm tired of carrying them," said Phil frankly. "'Sides, they're pretty nearly dead. Livy'll have to get some her own self."

Miss Ellis then launched into her story. It concerned a small legacy to which she was entitled, and which some conscienceless individual was trying to divert into his own pockets. She was fiercely proud, but she managed to let out the facts of her life, though with no complaining attitude of mind. She was a music teacher with, she said, others dependent on her, and looking at her neat, severe clothing I felt instinctively that "others" were a drain on her slender resources. Then, quite casually, she mentioned that it had been Miss Lynn who had advised her to consult me. I glowed. Miss Lynn! Dear glorious girl! Though she had seemed quite unaware of my existence, except when the fact of it was thrust upon her notice, she had proved herself not so oblivious after all, since she had thought of me and sent me a "client," an actual client, with the tender thought, perhaps, of being a help to me. She should never know that her kind intention was defeated because I could not find it in my conscience to take a fee from this heroic little worker.

"Miss Lynn?" I said eagerly. "You know her well?"

"Not well—oh, no. But she is taking a few finishing lessons from me. I assure you, sir, that at one time in Sydney, Clarissa Ellis had a large connection among the best families, but my methods, no doubt, have grown out-of-date, but they are sound, sir, sound, and Miss Lynn had heard of me from one of my old pupils, and she—she is peculiarly sympathetic, and somehow I found myself telling her of my difficulties, and she advised me to consult you."

"Quite right," I said heartily. "And what day does Miss Lynn take her lesson?"

"Wednesday, at three-thirty," she answered. But she looked naturally very much surprised, and I realized my unprofessional attitude, and blushed. I endeavored, unsuccessfully, to waive the question of fees, but found myself falling foul of her stiff-necked pride, and had to listen to a rather severe homily on unprofessional quixotism and unthrift, but in the middle of it I surprised a sudden tear on the little lady's cheek. And at this moment Phil came bouncing in. He stopped, looked at Miss Ellis, and then at me reproachfully.

"Had Ruddy been making you cry?" he asked. "Never you mind, Missis Ellis, I'll give you my sixpence what Ruddy's going to give me for not telling he loves Miss Lynn bestest of any one in the world. Oo! *I've told!* Does that count, Ruddy? It was an axibent."

He looked at me anxiously, and you could have lit a candle at my face by the feel of it. Fool that I had been! In a late game of "Who you love best in the world," a game Phil and I often indulged in together, I, in a moment of weakness, had allowed him to surprise my precious secret, and then, in a panic, more fatuously still, had bribed him to secrecy. And now the murder was out, and a paralyzing silence held the three of us. Venturing at last to glance at Miss Ellis, however, I saw on her face a look of understanding, sympathy, and demure amusement, which told me there had been a possible romance in the history of the faded spinster. And then she did a very beautiful thing, which made me her friend for life. For, holding out her hand, she said imperturbably:

"You may perhaps wish a little further talk with me on this matter. If so—any Wednesday afternoon you will find me at home."

I stammered out some fervent thanks and pressed her hand. Then Phil offered to conduct her to the lift, and assured her, on her saying she was nervous and preferred the stairs, that she "must not mind"; it was only when you "first started that your stomach did fall down a little."

When he returned I snatched him up, and tossed him into the air.

"Oh, Phil," I cried, "your bold methods have won for me—*L'audace, L'audace, toujours L'audace, mon ami!*"

"You need n't be calling me names, Ruddy," said Phil in an offended tone. "Is it about the sixpence?"

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH THE SPINSTER PLAYS THE PART OF THE GOOD FAIRY

I SPENT the greater part of the next twenty-four hours trying to concoct some remarkable excuse, on the strength of which I might ask an interview with Miss Lynn. And the following morning, Fate being kind, I met the girl face to face on the post-office steps. So surprised was I that, hastily lifting my hat, I had passed her and was kicking myself for a fool before I had well realized my chance had come—and gone. Looking back, I saw her buying roses from one of the flower sellers, and hurried after her.

"Miss Lynn," I said, "a moment," and she turned to me with that smile I was beginning to know, which, charming as it was, was so aggravatingly like the kind of smile she might give to anybody.

"Yes!" she said, and waited.

"I saw your friend, Miss Ellis," I began.

"Oh, yes!" she said brightly. "I believe she did think of asking a little legal advice from some one. So she went to you?"

"Yes," I said quietly. "It was kind of you to think of me."

I had the satisfaction of seeing her redden slightly. She had evidently not meant me to know of her move in the business at all, but she punished me by saying airily:

"Not at all! Poor little Miss Ellis has very little money, and I knew that beginners like yourself cannot afford to be such gobbling sharks over fees as the others."

It was cruel—in one stroke dispelling my illusions as to her wish to help me, and revealing her airy contempt as to my pretensions of press of business. But the next moment she was earnest and sweetly serious while she told me of Miss Ellis' struggle to support herself and an elderly brother, half-hypochondriac, half-hypocrite. How sweet she looked standing there, her bright face above the bright roses just shadowed with seriousness, as background the blaze of color on the flower-heaped stall and the huge green-lined umbrella like a tent above it, and she in her white frock and shady hat looking as fresh and dewy as any rose of the morning.

I wanted to ask her to come to Sargent's for a cup of morning tea, but had n't the courage, and asked her if I might put her in her tram instead.

"Oh," she said with her little mocking smile, "I'm quite capable of looking after myself. Good-by."

And with a nod she left me. After a moment I followed and saw her get into a Watson's Bay car. Feeling quite like a Sherlock Holmes, I set about proving to my own satisfaction my deductions that she was bound for home; her flowers, her parcels, the time allowed for getting home to lunch, and so on. The next Wednesday I took Phil with me and set out to visit Miss Ellis, ostensibly on business. The Spinster herself opened the door to Phil's imperative ring, and as his eye was still glued to the keyhole, both got something of a surprise.

We entered the narrow hall. Somewhere within we could hear the strains of the piano, and I pictured to myself Millicent with her white fingers sweeping the keys. Excusing herself, Miss Ellis invited us to wait for a few moments in a room on the right, and hurried away. But as I noticed she entered a room on the other side of the hall, and through a doorway within, I judged that the piano player must pass out that way. I immediately became restive lest the elusive Millicent might meanly slip away, and with incredible effrontery I transferred myself and Phil to the opposite room; a kind of waiting room for pupils, I judged it. In a few minutes Miss Ellis and Miss Lynn came in. I doggedly ignored Miss Ellis' air of faint surprise, and as Phil was busy counting the chair legs he said nothing. Miss Lynn greeted me with a smiling nod and Phil with effusion. He submitted to her kiss, but wiped it off immediately, and after a few minutes' chat she said she must go.

"Oh, don't go, Miller," said Phil sociably. "We'll be having some tea soon," a pure assumption on his part, but like most of his assumptions, destined to become fact. Miss Ellis glanced at her pupil.

"If," she said in her stiff way, "you would stay and take a cup of tea, Miss Lynn, I should be pleased."

It was plain this was an invitation for the first time, that Miss Ellis' fierce pride feared a possible rebuff. Millicent, however, was not of that mettle, and with a charming smile she replied:

"Thank you. Indeed, Miss Ellis, I should love a cup of tea, and I want a talk with Phil, too. Phil," she added, "when are you going to write me another letter?"

"Oh, some day to-morrow," answered Phil easily. "Did you like that one I writed before?"

"I should think so. I have it still. I hope you have kept mine."

"No," he said; "old letters are n't no good to me, but Ruddy likes them—Ruddy has kept it."

"Phil," I said feebly, "you—you don't know what you are talking about."

"Yes, I do," he declared. "Don't you remember, Ruddy, you put it in your pocket?"

And I had fondly dreamed he had never noticed my action, or would, at least, have forgotten it, since he had made no comment thereon.

"That day," proceeded Phil, intent on establishing a case, "you said Miller was the cat's mother."

A paralyzed silence followed this which I feebly endeavored to break up by saying with rather a ghastly laugh:

"Children have such extraordinary imaginations."

"Children and fools," remarked Millicent maliciously.

At this moment, fortunately, Miss Ellis created a diversion by rising to get tea, and Phil volunteering to help, they went off together.

"What a delicious kiddie," said Miss Lynn. "So frank and straightforward."

"A fiend," I groaned, "willfully perverting my most innocent remarks and actions." And then I added, "You—you don't believe about that letter?"

"Give it me," she said imperiously.

"Never!" I said, and my hand went to my breast pocket.

She laughed a low laugh of complete satisfaction at the success of her ruse. On an impulse I took out the letter, and handed it to her, but I watched it jealously. She took it, smiling, but as we heard Miss Ellis and Phil approaching she suddenly handed it back to me, and before I could express my thanks the other two entered.

"There's some cake and some br'e'n-butter," announced Phil. "A piece to go round and one piece over—I've counted them—and nobody must n't take too much milk 'cos the milkman has n't been yet, so tiresome of him, Miss Ellis thinks, an' if no one wants the last slice of cake I can have it, but I must n't ask for it."

At this moment the cakes he was carrying on a perilously slanted plate, slid, stiffly starched little napkin and all, on to the floor. Miss Ellis looked distinctly annoyed, but I secretly sympathized with Phil, as the same thing had happened to me in fair ladies' drawing rooms. Phil was not much disconcerted.

"They've all fell on the piece of rag, 'cept one," he said cheerfully, and took out his handkerchief to wipe that one, and looked much surprised when Miss Ellis caught it from his hand indignantly. We all had tea, and then sugar having given out in consequence of Phil sitting next to Miss Lynn, with the sugar basin between them, Miss Ellis rose to replenish the bowl. Miss Lynn sprang up, however, and said coaxingly:

"Let me get it, Miss Ellis, do. Come, Phil, you will show me where the sugar lives."

She held out her hand, which Phil took, but I said complainingly:

"It's not fair; it's my turn to help with the tea."

Phil's little face fell, but he is the soul of honor, and he said with regretful heroism:

"It *is* his turn, Miller."

"But *he* does n't know where the sugar lives, and I want you."

"I can't help it if she chooses me, Ruddy," said Phil anxiously, and I, assenting, off they went. Soon after, Miss Lynn rose to go, and I at once followed suit. We strolled along to the tram stop in company.

"Do you often pay an afternoon call on Miss Ellis?" asked the girl, and dimpled at me mischievously.

"N—no," I said. "I had some business"—and there I stopped with the disconcerting consciousness that I had completely forgotten the alleged reason of my visit. Miss Lynn gave a little insulting laugh.

"You men are so transparent," she said, "and so—so *truthful*."

"There are exceptions," I said stiffly, accepting the inference.

"Oh, yes, perhaps—some," she conceded.

"D. A. for instance," I proceeded with gloomy sarcasm.

"Ah, yes, to be sure," she returned. "D. A. — a dear fellow."

I savagely set my foot upon a line of ants deploying across the footpath, and just then a tram swung round the bend.

"Now, Phil," I cried briskly, "here's the car. Look alive! I'll take your music, Miss Lynn."

"Thank you, no," she said laughing. "I'll take it myself, and say good-by."

"Good-by?" I stammered. "But—but—this is the car to town."

"Exactly—but I don't want the car to town, if you don't mind."

"But," I persisted, "you can't get the Watson's Bay car here."

"Well—who said I wanted the Watson's Bay car?"

"You took it last time," I said rather feebly.

"So you followed," she laughed. "Oh, Mr. Lingard!"

By this time the car had stopped, and Phil was hopping into it, so I had perforce to follow, stung by her mischievous laughter. But I had my revenge. For, as we were taking our seats she called out, merrily malicious:

"Good-by, Philip; I'm so sorry I'm not going back to town with *you*, dear."

I leaned forward, taking off my hat again.

"So am I, *indeed*," I cried fervently. "*Good-by!*" And had the satisfaction of seeing her redden furiously as she bit her lip. No one in the car knew my name was not Philip.

When we reached home I said to Phil reproachfully:

"You should n't have told about the letter, old chap. That's not cricket, you know."

"But you did take it, Ruddy, you know," he said accusingly.

"Guilty!" I conceded. "But—but you don't want it back, do you, old man?"

"Oh, no," said he, "it is n't no good to me.

You can have it, and I can get you lots an' lots more of old letters, Ruddy. There's lots of daddy's and mummy's at home, an' they don't want them—you can have them all if you like."

"Thanks, awfully!" I replied gratefully. "But this one will do me nicely, if you're sure you can spare it."

"Course I can; 'sides, Miller'll write me another letter whenever I want it."

"Lucky dog!" I sighed enviously.

"What dog? Where?" cried Phil, running to the door with every sign of interest, and casting rather a reproachful glance at me as he returned.

"Merely a figure of speech, my son," I replied.

"Oh," said Phil. "I can make figures, too, becept the three will come wrong way round. Have you got a pain, Ruddy? You're making such a face."

"Right here, sonny," said I with a portentous sigh, and laid my hand on my left-hand waistcoat.

"*My* pain is always lower down," said Phil with sympathetic concern. "You should take some eupalyptus. It's very nasty; but you must n't mind, it'll do you good."

"I will, Philip, I will," I said. "And now what about a game at Wild Indians?"

Instantly the fun sprites were in Phil's gray eyes, and he gave the howl of pure inarticulate delight with which the small boy expresses his feelings best.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH "THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES" FIGHT FOR ME

THE gods were surely on my side, the "stars in their courses" fought for me, for a week later, entering a restaurant, I sat down, purely by chance, at a table at which sat Millicent and a tall soldierly looking man whom she introduced as her father. We entered into conversation, and I found him a genial companion, and as we were parting he did the great service of inviting me to "look in" on him and his daughter any Sunday afternoon. It appeared they lived in one of the big boarding houses in Macquarie Street, right under my nose as it were, and I, all the time, had been imagining my divinity as being located at Watson's Bay or the wilds of Cooges. I looked at her reproachfully, and she looked back at me with a ripple of frank amusement.

"Well, good-by," she said demurely. "We'll see you some Sunday then. Bring Phil with you—and don't make the mistake of taking the Watson's Bay car."

The next day I saw Phil, and extended the invitation to him. He was aggravatingly lukewarm about the whole thing.

"Let's go to Manly instead," he suggested coaxingly. "We'll have bosker fun. You can bury my legs in the sand."

"Oh, no, Phil," I said. "Millicent expects us, you know."

"You go then, Ruddy. I'll play with Livy."

But, rightly or wrongly, I fancied I relied for my welcome on Phil's presence, and I wheedled him into a promise to accompany me.

"There's her dog, you know," I reminded him.

Ye gods! What a Goth to be tempted by the dog and ignore the paramount claims of the mistress, for at the mention of the animal he was won over. I am afraid in these times I was not an inspiriting companion for Phil, my mind running a good deal on the one topic. For instance, falling into a reverie on this occasion, I was recalled by Phil rather plaintively remarking: "You've got that pain again, Ruddy?"

"No, Phil," I replied; "on my honor, no."

"You look sick," he persisted.

"Love is a disease, Phil," I said. "If you loved—er—some one very much, what would you do about it?"

"I'd go and tell her," answered Phil, disdaining abstractions, and as usual his advice was so clearly not to be gainsaid that I wondered why I did not follow it. Yet I hesitated.

"What then?" I said hollowly.

"Then," he replied, "I'd go and give her a big, big love, and free kisses."

"A thousand and three," I amended with fervor, thrilling with the ecstasy of that thought.

"Goodness, that's a lot!" cried Phil.

"Not one too many," I said positively.

So disgracefully eager was I that the very next Sunday "as ever was," I presented myself with Phil at the house in Macquarie Street. We were shown into a private sitting room, over which the stiff gentility of the boarding house had left its trail, but various pretty feminine touches (which I unhesitatingly ascribed to Millicent, though for aught I knew they might have been the visible expression of the esthetic yearnings of a landlady's daughter) did their best to discount it.

Here, after an appreciable interval which Phil occupied in counting the pictures on the wall, we were joined by Mr. Lynn. He was wearing carpet slippers, on which Phil made instant and admiring comment, being violently enamored of a dog's head worked on each of them. These slippers, in conjunction with a haziness about the eyes and a general abstraction of manner, led me to the unwilling conclusion that we had roused Mr. Lynn from his Sunday afternoon nap, an unpardonable offense in the eyes of an elderly gentleman. My discomfiture, too, was not decreased by our host casually remarking that Millicent was still at "that Sunday school folly," acting as a kind of *locum tenens* to a friend who had taken a holiday for the purpose of getting married, and that he, meantime, was neglected. That "Sunday school folly"! Positively I had forgotten all about it, and so in my schoolboyish precipitancy I had overreached myself, and should probably not see her at all, for already my visit was approaching the limits allowed for first calls. In calculating how much longer in decency I might remain, conversation lagged, and Phil sighed and yawned at intervals, extremely bored and taking no pains to hide it. At last in desperation I rose.

"Come, Phil," I said, "I think we must be getting along."

"Oh, no," he replied; "we have n't had tea yet."

With Phil, tea, at the hour set apart for it, is a sacred rite, not to be lightly set aside;

an afternoon visit without tea, then, is a ceremony shorn of its chief observance, and so meaningless.

"'Sides," he continued, "you have n't seen Miller yet. You know," turning to our host with engaging candor, "Ruddy did n't come to see *you* at all. He ——"

"Philip!" I cried in an awful voice of warning.

"It's all right, Ruddy," he answered reassuringly, with a series of broad winks and nods, intended to convey that I might certainly rely on his discretion, "I'm not going to tell about — you *know*."

Still seeing doubt in my gaze, he tiptoed across to me, and with elaborate precaution putting his lips close to my ear, hissed audibly: "About your loving Miller best of everybody. Don't you listen" (to our host); "it's a secret."

I prayed Mr. Lynn might be afflicted with deafness.

Phil turned again to him:

"Ruddy came to see your girl," he said.

"That's what they all do," chuckled Mr. Lynn. "The old man is of very little account. But that's a very good idea of the boy's about tea, so just you wait awhile. Milly will be in soon."

I needed no pressing, but could not help peopling this room with dozens of eager men, and wondered gloomily if D. A. had the effrontery to come every Sunday. Soon after, Millicent came in, and, fortunately, unattended. She greeted me, as usual, in her non-committally friendly manner, and Phil with warmth. Then tea was brought in, and we all had a delightful talk, and I quite forgot the limits of my call were long since passed till Phil said, abruptly:

"I'm tired of being here, Ruddy; let's go home."

"Oh, Phil, I am hurt!" cried Millicent. "Do come and sit on the couch with me, and tell me all about yourself."

Phil went unwillingly, with many wriggles and much dragging of feet, and she slipped an arm round his ungracious neck, and cuddled her cheek down on to his thick shock of blond hair.

"I'm telling Phil he should go to Sunday school," I remarked, and Phil shot an uneasy glance at me.

"No, I won't," he said hastily. "I know all about the Bible."

"Do you really, Phil?" cried Millicent. "Then tell me. What do you know about?"

"I know about Jophes and his little goat of many colors that died of the blood of a kid. What are you laughing at? Ruddy told me that."

"Only at your revised version, dear," said she in a voice that trembled.

"I have n't got one of those," answered Phil seriously, as though it were a new stamp.

"Well, go on. What else about Joseph?"

"He had a sheep and there were 'leven other sheep, and they all bowed down to his sheep an' so he—that's all I know about Jophes—you 're laughing."

"I 'm not—I 'm not—tell me some more, do."

"I don't know any more," said Phil, and sat kicking the leg of the couch while Millicent exerted all her powers of sweet persuasion in vain.

"I wonder," she said to Phil, "if your mother would lend you to me for an afternoon—and we could go and have tea somewhere."

"And Ruddy, too," said Phil.

"Please!" I said imploringly, and wanted to hug Phil.

"Oh, but Ruddy"—how pretty it sounded on her lips—"Ruddy has his work to do."

"Oh, Ruddy does n't do any work," cried my friend. "He only sits in his ossif and talks to people."

We both laughed, and Phil, conceiving he had said something funny though he had n't intended to be humorous, laughed loudly also, and said:

"Was n't I funny?"

Phil stuck to his guns stanchly, to my secret delight and gratitude, and finally Millicent gave in, which I think the dear rogue had meant to do all along.

"Oh, well, bring your friend too," she cried in pretended pettishness, "since you are such inseparables."

"No, we're not," Phil denied.

"Not what?"

"Not—that," said Phil shyly.

"What's that?" asked Millicent teasingly.

"What you said."

"What *did* I say?"

"You know."

And there the matter stood. Accordingly, the next afternoon Phil and I stood under the wishing tree in the Gardens, waiting for Millicent, to whom we extended the time-honored privilege of her sex of being half an hour late and no questions asked. During this period of waiting I had to decidedly negative Phil's disinterested plan for amusing Millicent, which was to go to Foy's and travel up the moving staircase, a fearful pleasure very dear to him. We had a pleasant tea on the broad veranda of the Garden Kiosk. At its conclusion the attendant sprite of the tea tray placed the little ticket, folded in a spirit of ostentatious delicacy, beside my plate.

"Mine, please," said Millicent, holding out an imperious hand.

"Allow me! said" I, firmly clinging to the ticket.

"But it was my treat," she said mutinously. "And you have no right."

"Don't be quallering," said Phil reprovingly; "let Miller pay if she wants to, Ruddy, and you'll have your pennies left for some chocs."

And so it was arranged. But I had one moment of exquisite revenge when, on Millicent turning to come back to our table, the girl at the pay desk cried:

"Your husband has gone on, madam, with the little boy."

I had sauntered down the steps, and affected to be quite deaf, but when Millicent joined me there was still a trace of burning rose-color in her cheek, and after walking on in complete silence for a time she spoke with sudden vehemence:

"That's a horrid place. I'll never go to the Kiosk again."

"Why?" said I innocently. "I thought it a very nice place, and such jolly girls."

For a time the sun of prosperity shone for me.

The offers of assistance from Mr. Wimple had materialized, and a small flow of business began to come my way. Added to that, I quite frequently met Miss Lynn, and I persuaded myself she was kinder than of yore. The detested D. A. never crossed my path, luckily for us both. I felt sure we should have disagreed.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH PHIL AND I HAVE A NIGHT OUT

"PHIL," said I one day when Phil, having dropped in sociably about lunch time, had consumed a light luncheon of three sardines, a slice of bread and honey, the end of a cold plum duff, half a banana, and a pickled cucumber, "Phil, I have a brand-new proposition for you." Phil dropped the banana skin which he had been scraping with his teeth, and in a bound was at my side, his eyes dancing.

"Show it to me," he demanded. "Does it live in a cage?"

"Tut, tut, my son, you misunderstand me. I mean a plan, a project, an idea."

"What's a I-dear?"

"A happy thought—a suggestion."

"I know what a 'gestion is. It's a pain you get here," he laid his hand on his small chest, "when you've had too much dinner." (I wondered if he spoke feelingly.)

"Well, hardly," said I. "That's more in the nature of a reflection."

"What's a reflection."

"A sadder and a *wiser* thought," I replied.

Phil looked at me sadly, and heaved a patient sigh.

"Sometimes you talk so silly, Ruddy," he said wearily. "And now please show me what you said you'd got for me."

"Well," said I, feeling a little foolish, "it's—er—nothing I've—er—exactly got for you. It's only, as I said a—a—plan—a—dash it all! Look here, have you ever been to a circus?" "A circus?" Phil's eyes grew a size larger. "Where there's lions an' tigers an'—an'—ephalants?"

"Yes."

"An' monkeys in cages?"

"Yes."

"An' ladies dancing on one leg on horses with their dresses all blown out?"

"Yes."

"An' where you give the clown your hat, Ruddy, an' he breaks a lot of eggs into it an' then jumps on it?"

"Well, I don't know about that. But I mean a circus."

"No, I've never been," said Phil, "but I'd love it! I'd love it! I'd *love* it!"

"You seem to know all about it, however," I said.

"I just know about that 'cos of seeing the pictures on the fences an' things, but I want to go. Oh! do take me, Ruddy, *please!* I'd rather see a circus than have that—that—opposition you promised me first."

"Well, perhaps, if your mother has no objection——"

"She has n't—not one," said Phil positively.

"Not one what?" said I.

"Not one—one—what you said just now."

"Objection. Now, how do you know she has n't?"

"'Cos I've never seen one in our house any time ever, an' I'd be sure to see it if it was there. I see everything. Beenie says I must have eyes in the back of my head. Have I?"

He turned his little blond poll for my inspection. "I don't see any," said I, "but run along home now and ask your mother, and I'll look in for you about seven this evening."

He skipped away to the door, but came back again to say solemnly:

"You're my bestest friend, Ruddy. You're not like a friend. You're *nearly* as good as God, I think." Then approaching his lips to my ear he whispered, "I have to only say *nearly*, 'cos He hears *everything*—Beenie says so." And with that he trotted off.

Later in the afternoon the telephone bell rang and I went to it. Phil's brisk little voice hailed me.

"Hello, Ruddy!"

"Hello, Buster!"

"I'm still thinking about that circus."

"Yes, that's all right; but I'm busy now."

"Livy's here."

"Oh!"

"Yes, an' she wants awf'ly much to come to the circus, too."

"Oh, does she? But perhaps Livy's mother ——"

"No! she would n't, not a bit," Phil anticipated me. "She said if Livy won't be a bother she can go an' welcome. Will she be a bother? Livy's mother's here, too, you know."

"Well, you see, old man, I love her very dearly, as you know," I said with gentle irony, "but, between us, I find her a bit of a handful."

"Livy's mother, you mean."

"No! No! No!"

"Well, Livy's waiting, an' she says——"

Phil's further remarks were cut short abruptly, and I guessed what had happened. The despotic Olivia Mary had come on the scene, and there was now a free fight for possession of the telephone. Even at this distance I could catch faint, far echoes of the fray.

"*Stop that!*" I said so loudly and imperatively that even over the wire I imagined I could feel both children jump. Then Olivia Mary's high-pitched little tones floated over the wire.

"Hello, Ruddy! I can come. You an' me'll have f-fun."

"The lions roar very loudly," I said meaningly.

"B-but they can't g-get out of their c-cages. Shall I wear my b-brown velvet coat an'—an' my white hat?"

"I would n't!" I said discouragingly, feeling rather a churl, but sincerely *not* wanting Olivia Mary.

"An'—an' my white shoes with b-buckles?"

"The monkeys'll get them," I said.

"I'll hide them under the seat—my feets, I mean."

"I perceive, then, that hints are quite wasted on you, madam," I said with elaborate irony.

"Yes," she said cheerfully. "W-what time will you b-bring the car?"

(Olivia Mary is a very grand little person, and does most of her traveling in motor-cars, of which luxuries she owns two, she will tell you.)

"In that case, all I can say," I proceeded, "is that I shall be charmed to escort you to the arena."

To my surprise she exhibited temper. I felt sure that, could I see her, she was stamping her foot.

"I won't! I won't! I won't!" she said. "I don't want to go there. I want to go to the circus w-with you and Ph-Phil."

"Seven, then, and be sure you're ready," I said, and rang off. At seven then, I rang the bell at Phil's hall door. There was an instantaneous scrambling rush inside, the excitable tones of Olivia Mary mingled with Phil's more deliberate tones, and over it the voice of Beenie, vainly urging good behavior, and quietness. In another moment both children were hanging on to my legs or coattails, both talking at once, questioning, clamoring, shouting. With great difficulty Beenie induced them both to go to the bathroom to have hands and faces sponged, and lingered a moment to say to me: "Oh, them children! Scarce a bite of tea would they take for running to the window to see if you was coming. And as for that Oliverer—the times and again I've had to tie her hair-bow, and all the time passing the most *disparishing* remarks about the way her own nurse ties it. Well, I'm thankful to goodness that mine's a boy-child, and does n't need no bows and ribbons on his hair."

And with that, in answer to repeated calls of "Beenie!" from the bathroom, she departed. She brought the children back with shining faces and brushed hair, buttoned Phil into his little greatcoat, and put on Olivia Mary's velvet coat and white hat with ribbon bows. Olivia Mary, seeing my eyes on her white shoes, flushed a little guiltily.

"Monkeys!" was all I said.

"I can hide them under my frock," she said instantly, and then deftly, to change the subject, she added: "Have you b-brought a taxi, or are we going in your car?"

"My car," said I firmly, "my trusty tram car."

"Oh, a tram car!" she said superciliously.

"I love cram cars," said Phil generously. "You can pick up hundreds of tickets in them."

"D-d-dirty people have these t-tickets," said Olivia Mary.

"They're not *all* dirty," objected Phil. "And 'sides ——"

"Here, come along, you two," said I.

"Good-by, Beenie," said Phil, lifting a beaming face to be kissed.

"Good-by, Phil," said Beenie, "an' be'ave like a little gentleman, even if those around you don't" (which seemed a distinct reflection on me).

"Good-by, Beenie," said Olivia Mary carelessly. "Do I look p-pretty?"

"As a picture," confided Beenie, and in an aside to me, "and well she knows it," adding to the little girl improvingly, "'Andsome is what 'andsome does, Oliverer, you know," a remark which was construed by that young person into meaning that a hansom had come for us. She danced out on to the steps to see for herself, and danced back again to say accusingly:

"Oh, you big story, Beenie!"

"Did you ever hear?" cried the scandalized Beenie. "Well, give me a boy-child ——"

The closing of the hall door, as both children dragged me bodily through it, cut short further reflections. I walked to the tram, a child on either hand, both chattering on entirely different subjects, only interrupting themselves, now and then, to contradict or challenge a statement of the other. So we went through the pleasant, lamplit dusk, and only once had threatenings of friction, when in the car both children wished to be the one to take the tickets. I decided in favor of the lady, and Phil sat back with flushed face, murmuring under his breath:

"Ladies first again, I s'pose! God did n't make ladies first, anyhow."

We arrived at last at the circus, which covered a good space of ground, with an immense circular marquee, and various outbuildings. The place was garish with flaring naphtha torches, and a brass band was blaring away manfully and very brassily.

"Is it the S-s-salvation Army?" asked Olivia Mary, and Phil replied: "The Salvation Army has red shirts, and these men have n't got no shirts, so they can't be it."

We walked along a covered way and then the first familiar whiff of the circus smote us. Who does not know this distinct and peculiar mingling of odors, and recognize it instantly for what it is, has missed one of the chief joys of childhood. Even now the thrill clutches me by the throat, and I feel a distinct desire to hurry into the midst of those varied odors of dampened sawdust, oranges and peanuts, rubber and escaping gas, and the rank smell of wild beasts. And just as we gave up our tickets at the door there burst forth a pandemonium of sonorous roars and shrill yelpings, at the sound of which Olivia Mary's little pink fingers burrowed deeper into mine, and even Phil's sturdy fist tightened its hold a little. Soon we were walking about among the stoutly barred cages in the menagerie, within which lowered the sullen brows of a lion, or the glittering eyes of a tiger or leopard glared steadily at the gazing people. In one cage was the famous "fighting" lion, a feature of the show, which had been taught to box. When Phil had spelled out the inscription he walked up and down in front of this cage for some time, and at last turned to me somewhat impatiently:

"Where's the unicorn?" he demanded. "'Cos that's what lions fight with. But I 'spect this lion's killed him dead. Good job, too! But what's they want the crown for, Ruddy? Only kings an' queens an' things like that wear crowns."

"I'm going to have a c-crown when I g-grow up," said Olivia Mary, "a real gold one with beautiful glass diamonds in it."

"Pooh! You're not a queen," said Phil.

"B-but I might b-be when I grow up. I might grow into one, mightn't I, Ruddy?"

"Possibly," said I.

"What's possibly mean?"

"Not probable; a very unlikely bird," said I.

At this moment we missed Phil, and after some search found him in front of the kangaroos' cage, staring intently at these creatures, which looked intensely bored. As we came up we heard him murmur with a faint sigh, "It's no good—they won't do it."

"Do what, old man?" I asked, and he answered:

"You know, these—these things have dear little pockets in their trousers. Beenie told me that, an' I've been waiting an' waiting to see them put their hands in their pockets an' take out their babies. They have n't done it once. Perhaps their pockets are worn out."

"What are them?" asked Olivia Mary. "They don't smell nice," and she wrinkled her dainty nose in disgust.

"Phil will tell you what they are," I said.

"He does n't know," said she disdainfully.

"I do," retorted Phil.

"What are they—well?"

Phil turned rather pink, and shifted uncomfortably.

"They're—they're—I know, but it takes a good long time to say it. You have to say it slowly. There's nothing to laugh at, Ruddy."

Phil was obviously trying to gain time, while he racked his small brains.

"Course you don't know it," said the little girl teasingly.

"I do. They—they—they're kangaroosters," he shouted triumphantly, and looked severely at two ladies who giggled.

"That is n't what my teacher calls them," said Olivia Mary. "S-she s-says them are something else. There is a p-picsher of them on the letter W page, an' it says:

"W for Wallaby, wild and wise,
She was borned 'neath the Ostrich Skies (probably Austral).
O! Wabbaly! Wabbaly! do not fear——"

She knitted her pretty brows, and thought a moment. "I can't remember the next b-bit, but it goes on this way:

"And lo! the W-w-w-abbaly wild has fled,
And d-dashes onward to scrub ahead."

"Why does she scrub her head?" asked Phil thoughtfully. "An' what does the Wabbaly do it with, Livy?"

I guffawed, and Olivia Mary answered with disdain: "Phil has n't any more sense than a-a catapult."

She uses these inappropriate similes freely and as they occur to her, but Phil chose to be mightily offended.

"I have," he said indignantly, "I have lots of senses, have n't I, Ruddy?"

"If you have a sense of smell, Phil, which I have," I said, "we'll move on from these malodorous beasts."

"What's malodorous?"

"It's what my little v-voice is" said Olivia

Mary, complacently. "I heard daddy tell m-mummy so one day."

We all moved on and rather timidly proffered buns to the elephants, a line of which stood twitching their great ears and waving their trunks in the air. Then we visited the monkey cages, which Olivia Mary could not be persuaded to come near, though I had long since explained that I had been joking about her shoes. Instead, she wandered across to the cage of a solitary and mournful specimen of a bald-headed eagle, and there waited for us.

"What's Livy looking at?" asked Phil, and I answered, "That's an eagle. Let's go and look at it."

"Let's creep up very softly and see if we can hear it praying," suggested Phil.

"Praying? What do you mean, old chap?"

There was incipient amusement in my voice which he instantly detected.

"That's what it says in the book at school," he said doggedly.

"E is for Eagle, a bird of pray
What carries the farmers' lamb-skins away."

"Lambkins!" said I. "Look—look at that little girl—ha! ha! ha! Is n't—is n't she funny? Ha! Ha!"

I had to give some excuse for my laughter, and in deference to Phil's feelings, invented one, but I don't think he was deceived in the least. We approached the miserable and mopy bird and Olivia Mary called to us:

"Look at its funny little b-blinky eyes, an' it's c-c-claws."

"Yes, look at its talons, Phil," I said.

"L-let me see them," cried the little girl, pushing Phil aside. "I have n't seen them, but I l-learned about them at Sunday school. A man had ten talons an' he buried them in—in a t-table napkin, or he buried one, I f-forget which."

"'Cos what for?" demanded Phil. "Was n't his mother angry about the napkin?"

"'Cos he wanted to, I s'pose. Don't bother, Phil," she replied.

After that we wandered about among the cages, and the children, of course at Phil's instigation, counted and recounted the animals until Olivia Mary wearied of his enthusiasm and said fretfully we'd better be getting in to see the "rest of it."

"Did you preserve the seats?" she asked, importantly.

Of course I had not thought of doing so, and confessed as much, guiltily. Phil and I would have been content to sit and dangle our feet from one of the narrow wooden planks which ran in tiers round the tent, feeling the drafts play round about our ankles, and dropping peanut shells and banana peels into the void beneath, but with this small fine lady it would not do at all.

Fortunately, we managed to obtain three "preserved" chairs in the front row, and sat there with the pleasant consciousness of being the envied possessors of the best seats in the house. For some time we watched three clever fellows in tights who ran about on invisible or almost invisible wires, and contorted themselves into weird positions, and drank water while standing on their heads, and did other strange feats.

These acrobats always bore me, and I was quite in sympathy with Phil's remark: "Those men in singlets do good tricks, but when is the circus going to begin?"

Then came in Tommy, the Clown, and the audience burst into instant applause, though, as Phil remarked to me, he had n't "done a single thing yet," and there seemed no call for such enthusiasm. But it seemed that there was, and that the audience, better informed than we, knew their Tommy. From the very beginning of things, even while the men in tights were giving their display, there had been a lank cadaverous creature in seedy "blacks" wandering, or rather shuffling, aimlessly about the ring. He wore a preposterous red wig, and an enormous white bow tie and his expression was nicely blended of imbecility and melancholy. This creature the young members of the audience hailed as "Dummy" and "Angus," pelted him with orange peel and peanuts, and laughed heartily at his painful grimaces and speechless gestures, but Phil regarded him with unwinking solemnity, evidently puzzled as to his use or purpose in the circus-scheme. He then dismissed him with the single remark: "He seems as silly as a ijjiot," and thenceforward ignored his presence. But "Tommy" was different. He was the orthodox clown in baggy white blouse and pantaloons, with an extraordinarily closely cropped cranium, a white-floured face, a wide-painted grin, and a mulberry nose. He wore an absurdly tiny steeple-crowned hat on the top of his head, and he was full of quips and questions and antediluvian jokes at which Phil squirmed with laughter, with the rest of the audience. He was a clever chap, too, and after making many bungling efforts at imitating the men on the trapeze, succeeded in the end in quite eclipsing their performances.

"Oh, good, good!" cried Phil, who had been feeling rather sorry for Tommy in his failures, and now clapped encouragingly. "What makes his nose like that, Ruddy?"

"Oh! that hall-marks the good clown," said I.

"'Cos what for did he?" asked Phil instantly.

"Oh, nothing!" said I absently, thinking of something else.

"Fancy!" said Phil, and leaned forward to say to Olivia Mary, "That Hall marked that good clown's poor nose like that for nothing."

"I don't care," said she, hard-heartedly. "He's so ugly."

Tommy was now riding a donkey round the ring, sitting face to tail and pretending the brute was his ship and its tail the tiller. So all went merrily until, unfortunately, Tommy and the ring-master had quite a row.

A very hectoring, bullying fellow, that ring-master, with a long whip which he kept cracking within an inch of Tommy's nose, and daring Tommy to answer him back. Everybody's sympathies were with Tommy. The quarrel came about in this way. The ring-master drew a rather magnificent looking handkerchief with a broad border of blue spots, rings and horseshoes, out of his tail-pocket, and flicked the dust off his coat sleeve with it, replacing it, after a bit of a flourish, in his pocket. In a moment Tommy had crept up and sneaked the handkerchief and thrust it into the front of his blouse. When the ring-master discovered his loss he was in a fine rage, I can tell you, and though Tommy, trying to look innocent, went down on his hands and knees, pretending to help him look for it, it was for no use. The ring-master (whom Phil had settled in his own mind was Hall) instantly suspected Tommy, and in a very short time had his property back again. Tommy got it again, however, and several times, hiding it variously in the ankle-string of his pantaloons, his pockets, and even his steeple-crowned hat, which the angry ring-master cleverly whisked off his head by lassooing it with the lash of his long whip. Then the clown began to get quite worried. He appealed to the audience. The handkerchief was his, he said, a keepsake given to him by his mother-in-law on her dying bed, and was made extra large to hold all his tears on such a joyful—he should say miserable—occasion.

"What's a keepsafe?" said Phil to me. "And what's a dying-bed? Beds don't really die, do they?"

I hurriedly explained, and bade him watch

Tommy. The ring-master had not yet discovered that the clown had again got possession of the handkerchief and was busily scratching a hole in the sawdust in which to hide it. His back was toward the ring-master, and Phil was watching him anxiously, with a roving eye occasionally directed toward the other man. Suddenly the ring-master felt his tail-pocket hurriedly, and turned angrily toward the unconscious Tommy. At the same moment Phil in uncontrollable excitement scrambled up on to his chair and yelled lustily:

"Look out! He's coming again! Stick it inside your shirt, you silly ijjiot!"

An absolute roar of laughter went up from the whole house, laughter in which the ring-master and the clown joined heartily. Phil's clear penetrating tones carried well and far, and few had missed his warning cry. He looked rather embarrassed, and a good deal surprised, and sat down hurriedly.

Tommy, with the disputed handkerchief in his hand, stopped opposite our chairs, and bowed profusely. "Well spoken, little man," he said. "In one act you've got the laugh I've been waiting and working for, for twenty years. Not a dry eye in the house," he concluded whimsically.

Phil leaned forward and said confidentially: "I'll mind your hankershif for you. I know a place," he nodded mysteriously.

"Where ever!" said Tommy, just as mysteriously.

"I'll sit on it," whispered Phil cautiously.

"The very thing," said Tommy enthusiastically. "Why did n't I think of that? But stay; I can't sit all my life. I'm not a barn-door fowl, and even a hen only sits three weeks at a time. Tell you what, you keep it for me; keep it altogether in memory of me."

He held out the handkerchief.

"What!" gasped Phil. "For a keepsafe, you mean?" His eyes sparkled. It was certainly a handsome handkerchief. Tommy nodded. But suddenly Phil's face fell.

"What about your mother-of-laws?" he asked. "Won't she mind?"

"Not a bit, dear old lady. She'd like it."

"Then," said Phil, gratefully, "thank you very much, and I'm so sorry Hall hurt your poor nose so."

Tommy gave me a half-knowing, half-inquiring wink, and answered vaguely:

"Yes, a bit of a bruiser, old Hall, is n't he?"

Then he was called away, for which I was rather glad, for Olivia Mary was whispering urgently and none too inaudibly:

"Make him go away, Ruddy. He's so ugly with his face. He f-frightens me."

Phil, seeing the ring-master very much occupied, was smoothing out his new possession admiringly.

"It's a lovely hankershif, is n't it, Ruddy? I'll give it to you on your next birthday, I think, but you won't mind me using it, until your birthday comes, will you?"

After that the fun grew fast and furious. There were beautiful painted ladies on galloping chargers with flowing manes and tails, and men who hung head downward in giddy heights, holding little boys in their teeth, and a tiger that rode a bicycle, and the famous fighting lion which did a little sparring with a little pug-faced man in tights and boxing gloves, and anything less like a unicorn could hardly be conceived. In short, there were many marvels, and watching Phil's absorbed face, I heartily wished myself back at *my* first circus once again.

"How do you like it, old fellow?" said I to him.

"Decent," he replied briefly. In the schoolboyish vernacular of the period, praise can no farther go. I turned to My Lady.

"And how do you like it, Mistress Mine?" I asked.

She sighed sentimentally. "I'd give the w-world to be a real circus girl like that one in the b-blue dress an' goldy shoes. There's n-n-nothing to laugh at," she answered.

I purchased a box of chocolates from the boy who went up and down with a basket, crying with monotonous reiteration:

"Oranges, bananas, ginger beer, nuts, cakes, sweets, and lemonade."

"Bag's-I, the silver paper," said Phil, and seeing objection struggling for utterance on Olivia Mary's halting tongue, I hastily bought another box which I handed her, giving the first to Phil. Phil's box, however, had some real or fancied superiority over hers, and she said so discontentedly, whereas Phil, in his good nature, so readily offered to exchange that she grew suspicious, and decided to keep her own, after all.

After the show was all over we hailed a taxicab, and started for home. Both the children were sleepy, but Phil was cheerfully garrulous, if a little rambling in his utterances, and Olivia Mary merely cross.

"That circus is a b-big story-teller," she complained. "On the picshers there was all sorts of ladies flying about in the air, and in the circus there—there—w-was n't one l-lady what flew."

"The difference between the real and the ideal," I said sententiously, and Phil roused up, scenting a riddle.

"I give in, Ruddy," he said, "an'—an' it was a *lovely* circus." His head drooped against my arm, and I gave him a surreptitious squeeze, glad, like Beenie, for the time, that mine was a "boy-child."

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH PHIL AND I ENTERTAIN

ONE wet Saturday, when Phil was spending the afternoon with me, I broached a plan I had been revolving in my own mind.

"Phil," said I, "what do you say to having a party?"

"A party?" Phil started up. "Oo, yes, bosker!"

That is the best of Phil. He is always so whole-hearted and sanguine in entertaining any pleasant project. I had been conscious of many doubts as to the possibility of my plan, but Phil never even took one into account, and his unquestioning acceptance heartened me considerably.

"You think it a good idea, then?"

"Yes, I love parties, but, Ruddy, who's going to have the presents?"

"What presents?"

"What the little boys and girls bring?"

"There are not going to be any little boys and girls."

Phil's face fell considerably.

"But how can there be a birthday without boys and girls and cakes and jelly, an' with your name on in hundreds an' fousands?"

"Oh, the cakes and jelly 'll be there all right but not the others. This is not a birthday—it's a party. My party will be Mr. Lynn and Millicent and Miss Ellis, and you can have Olivia Mary, that is, if Mrs. Binks will let us have a party, so you be off and see if you can get on her soft side."

"Which is it?" he asked. "All her sides seem the same when you lean against her, don't you think?"

"I've never taken such a liberty, Phil," I answered.

Phil departed to the kitchen, and I purposely left the door open to profit by his masterly tactics.

As usual, his methods were direct and to the point.

"A party's coming, Binks." (He never accorded her the prefix, and from him she never resented its omission.)

"Drat it!" she cried. "Always coming when a body's extra busy. Where's he coming, back or front?"

"All over the house," said Phil cheerfully. "They always do at a party, you know—nobody cares."

"Oh, I thought you meant a lady or a gentleman, a party like that. You mean a swarry — Wesleen Mission?"

Mrs. Binks has a weakness for tea-fights and entertainments of this description, a taste which Phil shares, for they have many interests in common, and hold long confabs.

"It's here, in this house," said Phil with intrepidity I should not have dared.

"What!" cried Mrs. Binks. "A party? Here? And who's going to do the cooking and the cleaning up after? Just tell me that, will you?"

"You, I s'pose," suggested Phil hopefully.

"Well, if that is n't like a man ——"

Closing the door softly, I left them to argue it out. I had every confidence in Phil, and half an hour later he came to me, with pastry crumbs on the front of his blouse and a dab of jam on his chin.

"Well?" said I. "The enemy repulsed with great slaughter?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Vanquished, all the Tartar horde, I say."

"I never did," said Phil, very pink, "only one that was burned on one side, and she said I could have that, and that's the most aggravating hoven Binks ever saw in her born days."

During the week I had some difficulty in restraining Phil's hospitable inclinations, for he issued invitations broadcast, and on the very day of the party I had to buy off two ragamuffin friends of his I found on the doorstep by his invitation.

My invitations were all accepted. On Phil's suggestion I had included Mr. Wimple, who, to my surprise, promised to come. Phil and I took immense pains to have everything very nice, and we were rather complacent over the result, but waited somewhat anxiously for the opinion of Olivia Mary, who arrived first, in a very fluffy creation of white embroidery, and lace socks. She surveyed the whole with a coldly critical eye.

"Is n't it pretty, Livy?" asked Phil admiringly.

"It is n't as p-pretty as my p-party," she answered. "I had a cake with b-birthday greetings writ with pink sugar."

"I think it's *very* nice, Ruddy," said Phil, slipping a consoling hand in mine.

Soon after, the other guests arrived, and Phil kindly took, in a great measure, the duties of host off my shoulders.

"Do you like it, Miller?" he asked with a beaming face. "I put those flowers there.

The piano is n't ours; a kind man at the shop lent it to us; we have to pay ten shillings. We did n't have enough cups and plates to go round, so another lady lent us those, and we have to pay a shilling every cup we break, and you 'll have to, too, if you break one, so be berry careful, everybody."

He subsided breathless, and everybody laughed except Olivia Mary, who had been accommodated with one of our own cups and now remarked severely:

"I-I 've got a cracked c-cup."

We had a delightful afternoon. Miss Ellis played on the kind man's piano a long classical selection to which we all listened politely. Mr. Wimple started to sing "A Life on the Ocean Wave," but forgot most of the words, and filled up the blanks with a "tummity-tum-tum-tum——" in lieu of the verse, which contented us just as well. Then Millicent, stripping off her long groves, sat down at the piano and played and sang several sweet little songs. I sat in blissful content. To have Millicent here in *my* room, playing on *my* piano—well, mine for the time, anyhow—filled me with a dreamy pleasure. After she had left the piano, Olivia Mary volunteered to say a "piece" she had learned at the "Kindergarter."

"With actions," she added importantly, and we politely assenting, she asked:

"Shall I say 'I s-saw a ship a-s-sailing' or 'A Froggy when he would n't go?'"

"A donkey, don't you mean?" I suggested.

"No, mine was a frog with a op'ra hat. I'll s-say that—no, I won't—yes, I will. N-no, I'll say C-c-cock Robin."

"Say 'Birds in their Nesters,'" suggested Phil, who has an odd habit of forming his plurals, thus: "nest-nesters, desk-deskers."

"Shan't. You p-put me out, Phil! N-n-now I'm going to begin."

She started off in a high, rapid voice with an up-and-down intonation:

"I s-saw a ship a-s-sailing
Sailing on the sea
An! no! the ship was lading
With p-pretty things f-for me.
There was apples in the cabing
And crumpets in the hole,"

("Comfits," translated Millicent to me, with a spasm of laughter, and Olivia Mary went on.)

"The masts was made of s-silk,
The sails was made of gold.
The four and twenty white mice (I mean)
The four and twenty sailors
That stood——."

"No!" with a little stamp of her foot, "I'll begin from the beginning again." Which she did, ending with a little triumphant rush:

"The capting said K-k-k—Quack-quack."

"Shall I say another?"

"I'd like to say one now, Ruddy," said Phil to my surprise, for he is usually very reluctant to "show off."

"Very well, old chap," I said. "If the company is not bored."

"He does n't know any," remarked Olivia Mary.

"Yes, I do," said Phil hotly.

"You're only in 'f-fat cat,' well!"

"I don't care. I know some potery as well as you."

"If Hermia," thus had Mr. Wimple rechristened Olivia Mary, "would be silent, we might be able to listen to Humphrey."

Millicent made Olivia Mary sit beside her, and allowed the child to despoil her of bangles and rings, with which the small coquette adorned her own slim little hands, and peacocked with vanity.

Meanwhile Phil, very red in the face, stood up like a soldier, very rigid, cogitating deeply, a frown on his forehead.

"Go on, Phil!" encouraged Millicent.

The silence was becoming painful.

"What shall I say, Ruddy?" appealed Phil to me, wriggling uncomfortably.

"Whatever you like, old man. You know some piece, surely."

"I know 'Ding-dong-dell, Pussy's in the well,' only I forget it."

"He knows 'Once there was a little kitty,'" volunteered Olivia Mary, "only he says it wrong."

"No, I don't!"

"Yes, you do."

"I don't."

"You do so."

"I don't!"

"You do."

"Hush!" said Millicent. "Tell about the kitty, Phil," and thus encouraged Phil sighed, wriggled, stood on one leg, cast up his eyes, giggled, and then plunged into that classic of our childhood:

"Once there was a little kitty,
Whiter as the snow;
In a barm she *used* to floric,
Long *time* ago.
Nine soft paws had little kitty,
All in a row——"

Phil stopped, evidently troubled by this somewhat remarkable natural fact, while Mr. Wimple shook his head, murmuring *sotto voce*, "Something wrong there," and Olivia Mary shrilled triumphantly:

"He's said it wrong. He ——"

Millicent's soft palm closed resolutely over her mouth, and Phil began again doggedly:

"Four soft paws had little kitty,
Paws as soft as dough,
And they *bit* the little mousie,
Long——"

"That's wrong!" up bounced the irrepressible again. "I'll say it! I'll s-say it; I know it. Let me say it."

"No, we don't want to hear you," said Millicent firmly. "Go on, Phil. Of course we *all* know the little kitty, and can help. This is the way it goes: 'Four sharp teeth had ——'"

"Wrong!" said Olivia Mary positively, and Millicent looked annoyed. "*Nine pearl* teeth — that's what it is."

"Nine pearl teeth," began Phil again doubtfully, and stopped.

"White as the snow," prompted Mr. Wimple. "How well I remember learning that when I was—eh, what?"—for Miss Ellis had broken in:

"Pardon me, Mr. Wimple, but you are incorrect; it is 'sharp and white,' I know. I learned it as a child."

"I think not, madam. God bless my soul! I was just such another little shaver as Humphrey. We must appeal to Miss Lynn."

"Well, both seem wrong to me," said Millicent. "I think it is something about 'running to and fro.'"

"Not the teeth, surely," I murmured, and Millicent retorted with warmth:

"Well, what is your version?"

"I refer the whole thing to Olivia Mary," I said. "But I have an impression that some one, or something, cried out, 'Oh!' Am I not right, Olivia Mary?"

"I'm sure you're not," said Millicent decisively, and Miss Ellis smiled in a superior way, and Mr. Wimple said, "I stick to my guns."

We all turned to Olivia Mary for judgment.

"You are all wrong," said that young lady crushingly, and then we became aware that Phil had discovered the right version for himself, and regardless of our preoccupation he was getting through it at a great rate, and now came triumphantly to the end of the stanza. We all applauded, and Phil, looking very pink and complacent, was just sidling on to my knee when Olivia Mary remarked chillingly:

"You w-went wrong, you know. I t-told you you would."

"Well, I collected myself," answered Phil with dignity, and with a little smothered sound, between tenderness and mirth, Millicent snatched him to her, crying:

"So you did, you darling, and your piece was much the nicer."

"B-b-better'n mine?" asked the outraged Olivia Mary in amazement.

"Yes, indeed!" nodded Millicent, caressing Phil's hair.

"I'm in p-pig, but!"

"I don't care."

"An' I can say free t-times—only I can't remember free eights are twenty-seven."

"An' I can say two times 'cept I don't know

"Trice tens are *twenty*,
Trice 'levens are *twenty*-two,
Trice twelves are twenty-*four*,"

cried Phil, in singsong.

After this our tragedy happened. Phil whispered to me, and, in defiance of etiquette, I whispered back to Phil, and we both had an air of mystery which excited Olivia Mary's curiosity to a fever point, till she danced with impatience. Then we formally invited Millicent to come and see our garden, and Phil stipulated she must keep her eyes shut till he told her to open them. He then led her by the hand. I wanted to pretend it was necessary that I should take her other hand, but she said, "Not at all," she would trust Phil to take care of her anywhere.

"I'll s-shut my eyes too, Phil," said Olivia Mary.

"You can if you like," said Phil coldly. "But it is n't nothing about you. It's a s'prise for Miller."

"If you mean about the garden," said the distractingly pretty fiend, "I'll just t-tell her all about it. They've went an'——"

Phil's look of appeal to me was coincident with my clapping my hand, not too gently, over Olivia Mary's lips, while Millicent, putting her hands over her ears, cried out:

"I'm not listening, Phil, dear!"

"Now," cried Phil, in triumph, and Millicent opened her eyes.

Phil looked at her, his face alight with delighted expectancy.

Down the length of the garden, brave and green and sturdy, in the tiny multiple flourishing heads of mustard and cress, ran the inscription, "Millicent Lynn," clear on the brown soil. But no cry of delight and surprise broke from Millicent's lips in answer to Phil's impatient looks. Only a deep flush sprang to her cheek, and she gave me one look of indignant surprise and hauteur. And in that moment of strained silence my heart sank with horrible misgiving—nay, certainty. What a blunder I had made! What a crass bungling, impertinent fool I had been! How should any girl not feel resentment at the sight of her name sprawling across a man's garden under the curious eyes of any stranger, or grinning tradesman, who chanced to cross it?

"Don't you like it?" asked Phil wistfully, his face clouding with disappointment. She did not answer him, but turned to me.

"I am surprised, Mr. Lingard, that you should take such a liberty."

"I am sorry, Miss Lynn. Phil thought that you ——"

"Oh, don't shelter behind the child, please," she broke in with a low vexed laugh. "Of course you suggested it."

"No, he did n't," cried Phil eagerly, not understanding, but loyal in my defense. "Not a bit. He just told me to do it, did n't you, Ruddy?"

"You see!" said Millicent, with another cruel little laugh.

"He buyed the seeds, too," proceeded Phil, unconsciously damning my cause with every word he spoke. "And drawed the letters with a stick, but he let me scatter the seeds 'cos I wanted to, berry much. It took a n'awful lot of seeds, too," he added mournfully, "and there was n't enough left to write my properly name, so I had just to write Phil," and he pointed to his own abbreviated name, rather patchy, in straggling, uneven characters.

"Why," exploded Olivia Mary, "that's not the way to spell Ph-Ph-Phil. F-i-l-l, Phil," she chanted, "an' he's went an' spelled it with a P."

But no one paid any heed to her. With something of an effort, Millicent called up a smile, and, slipping her arm round Phil's neck, turned his little earnest face up to hers.

"I think it was lovely of you, Phil dear," she said, "and thank you ever so much, little boy," and she kissed him.

"Thank Ruddy, too," said Phil.

"Ruddy asks for no thanks—but pardon," I said, half-jesting, half-earnest. But to this she returned no answer, changing the subject neatly, and though, for the rest of the afternoon she was pleasant and gay, I felt that I was in disgrace, and that our pleasant bond of camaraderie had yielded to the strain and snapped. Old Mr. Wimple, who had practically monopolized Millicent all the afternoon, on that most unjustifiable plea that elderly gentlemen are fond of advancing, "I'm only an old fellow," was the first of my guests to leave, and as I was bidding him good-by he exclaimed in his loud, hearty voice, "Lingard, my boy, I like your fiancée very much. Nice girl, very, Miss Lee—congratulations!"

Then he rushed off, and just behind me stood Millicent. How much had she heard? What would she think? She could know nothing of Mr. Wimple's fatal habit of jumping to conclusions. I thought her manner was, if anything, a shade colder as she said good-by.

When the last of them had gone, Phil and I and Olivia Mary, who said she would be "allowed" to stay to tea, if she was asked, returned to the dining room, which looked indeed a banquet-hall deserted, with its litter of soiled china, and its chairs pushed here and there. While the children wrangled over the remains of the colored jelly in the glass dish, and drained the lemonade bottles, I stood in a rather dismal reverie, sucking at my pipe and thinking deeply. Then we took Olivia Mary home, and at her gate she recited her little set speech of thanks, evidently drilled into her.

"Thank you very much for a pleasant evening — afternoon, I mean."

"That's all right," I said. "Glad you enjoyed it."

"I did n't *enjoy* it very much," she answered disparagingly. "I had only one cream puff and Phil had two, an' all the p-parties I've been to, we fish for toys in a tub full of brandy."

"Indeed!" I cried, for this extravagance savored of the freak-banquets of American millionaires, but Phil lightened my bewilderment by explaining:

"She means brand, like what you give fowls for dinner."

"Phil," said I plaintively, on our homeward way, "I *can't* love Olivia Mary!"

"It's very wicked to hate any one," he replied in a highly moral tone. "I don't hate any one, 'cept only the butcher's dog 'cos he bit Terry in two places, and God would n't mind that, would He, Ruddy?"

Phil was to remain all night with me, and as he was very sleepy I carried him off to bed as soon as he had had a bite to eat. He explained, between yawns, that he always had his warm bath on Saturday night, but as he was so tired we waived that rite. As he stood before me, blinking sleepily, while I pulled his jersey over his head, rumpling his hair very much in the process, or sat him on my knee to unbutton his stout little boots and admire his sturdy scratched knees and firm brown calves, I felt a delight in his strong boyish beauty, as though he had been my own, but when in his ridiculous little pink-striped pajamas he cuddled his cheek against my shoulder, and I felt the warmth and weight of his firm little body and strong arms, I began dimly to comprehend, in my blundering man's way, why mothers so yearn to keep their boys babies as long as possible. We had made up a bed out of a short couch and two chairs, and all day Phil had been delighted with this novel style of bed, and had even wanted to exhibit it to our guests, but now, after looking at it very closely, he confessed a desire to sleep in a "properly" bed. So I popped him into my bed, reflecting that I could move him when he slept. And now this sleepy, blinking, and yawning boy became perversely wide awake. He coaxed me to lie beside him and tell him stories, demanding another and another, until at last I said:

"I'll tell one more, Phil; but mind, it's the last, the very last, so choose your own."

After some deliberation, he chose the story of Daniel in the den of lions, and asked how many lions there was. I had n't the least idea, so I said "Seven," and hoped Scripture might not confound me. But Phil seemed disappointed and said, "Only seven?" in such a dissatisfied tone that I answered brazenly, "I mean seventy-seven," and he seemed much more content. What are a paltry few score lions to stand between Phil and his sense of the fit?

He made me roar for the lions until he clutched me, and burrowed into my chest with his head, in an ecstasy of mingled terror and delight. It was in the midst of formulating a somewhat complicated problem as to how much of Daniel I thought each lion would get, if "God had loved the lions better'n He loved Daniel, and had let him be etten up," that his voice trailed off sleepily, and quite suddenly he fell asleep, as I knew by his soft regular breathing. It was a relief to me, as I had grave doubts as to whether Daniel would have "gone round" my seventy-seven lions, to any satisfactory degree. I had work to do, so I gently disengaged Phil's strong little hands. They made one feeble semi-conscious clutch after me, then relaxed, and with a sleepy sigh the boy rolled over and settled down. It was perhaps an hour later that I, deep in papers and in a halo of tobacco smoke, was startled by a small voice from across the hall.

"Ruddy!"

"Yes, Phil."

"Are you there?"

"Yes—here for hours yet. Go to sleep."

"I can't."

"Turn over and try."

A moment later: "I've turned over, and I can't."

"You will soon. Shut your eyes tight."

"All right. Good night, Ruddy."

"Good night, Phil."

Five minutes later: "Ruddy!"

"Yes."

"You there still?"

"Yes."

"Oh, good night!"

"Good night."

A few minutes' silence and then: "Ruddy—the clothes are slipping off of me."

"Pull 'em up, then."

"I have, an' now I can't find the pillow. Oh, here it is, I had my feets on it. Good night, Ruddy."

"Good night, boy!" rather shortly.

Fifteen minutes filled with deep breathings, sighs, and creakings of the spring-mattress from across the hall. Then came softly, "Ruddy?"

No answer.

"Ruddy" — (pause) — "Ruddy" — "Rud*dee!*" — RUDDY!" The last a positive roar.

"Look here, Phil," I cried, "this won't do, you know. You must go to sleep like a good chap."

"Ruddy, I want to tell you something."

"Oh, it'll keep till the morning."

"I want a drink, Ruddy, I'm so thirsty!"

"Not really, Phil?"

"Yes, I am—I'm *so* thirsty!"

"Very well, old chap."

I took him in a brimming glass of water, which he barely sipped at before handing it back to me. He moved across the bed.

"Lie down by me," he said, wheedlingly.

"I can't, Phil; I've work to do. Good night."

I had got as far as the door when I heard reproachfully, "You have n't said good-good night."

"I have, little chap," I said, wheeling about, the candle in my hand showing his pink cheeks, tousled hair, and wide eyes above the sheets, "lots of times!"

"Not—not properly—you never kissed me."

"Dear little chap!"

I was back in a moment, and kissed him

very heartily, rearranged the bedclothes, and turned away.

"God bless you!" he said gravely, and I echoed, "God bless you, Phil!" and went away with softened thoughts.

Across these thoughts broke a small persistent voice:

"Ruddy!"

"Ah!—h—h!" I swallowed a word unuttered.

"I have n't said my prayers."

"Well, say them in the morning; I guess the Lord will forgive you this once."

"He can't take care of me if I don't ast Him. There's so many little boys, He might forget if I don't remind Him."

I rose resignedly, and went to the other room in no mood for conducting prayers, but Phil's little devout face and folded hands, as he knelt, disarmed me. He rambled conscientiously through a great many private petitions, among which he was good enough to include my name for blessing, opening his eyes to remark in a conversational tone, "This is my friend Ruddy, dear God. I've often told you about him, and now here he is." He concluded all with a very sonorous "Ah-men!" but just at the end murmured something under his breath. My curiosity was aroused.

"What did you whisper, Phil?" I asked.

He colored, wriggled a bit, and began ostentatiously counting the fringes on the counterpane, by way of changing the subject. On being pressed, however, he said his whisper concerned Terry and his chances of ultimately reaching Heaven.

"Beenie says it's wicked to pray about dogs, but God made him as well as me, and Heaven's the nicest place of all, nicer even than the Gardens, and it would be just the same, if it had 'Dogs not omitted' on the gate. And 'sides, God can do anything, can't He?"

"I—I believe so," I returned.

"Frow the world into the sea, and fly up to Heaven in an airing-plane, could He?"

"It's to be hoped He would n't want to do anything so silly!" I replied evasively.

"No, but could n't He, though?"

"Now you go to sleep, Phil."

"Could He though—Ruddy? Could He? Could He, Ruddy?"

"I suppose so," I said testily, driven to bay.

"Yes," murmured Phil in a satisfied tone, "God can do anything. He could make little pigs' tails grow out of their noses if He liked. He would n't though, 'cos He's kind, and the little pigs could n't feed theirselves if He did."

"I'm going back to my work," I said, "and you're going right off to sleep like a man."

"How does a man go to sleep?" he asked.

I picked up the candle, and Phil remarked wistfully: "I w—wonder what it's like at daddy and mummy's place now!"

As I detected incipient tears in the quavering tones, I put down the candle hastily.

"See here, little chap, how'd you like me to lie down with you?"

The grateful beam that answered me was enough. I blew out the light, lay down beside him, and in five minutes my guest was asleep. I cautiously slipped away, and when later I came to bed myself, I found him stretched right across the bed, and most of the clothes on the floor. As I gently removed him to his own couch, and felt the quiet rise and fall of his childish breast, and marked the innocent sweetness of his face, I thought Peter Pan must have enticed away the sturdy, restless, chattering boy of waking hours, and left some lovely changeling in his place. If so, he repented of his bargain, and returned him before morning, for about 5 A.M. I was rudely awakened from a dream of Millicent, particularly kind, by something hard and heavy striking me full in the face.

"Ugh! ah!—um—um—who the deuce threw that?" I cried angrily, starting up.

"Me!" shrilled Phil's delighted voice, and there, dancing precariously on his improvised couch, I saw the imp of the day. The missile was the cushion from the couch in the dining room, which, being short of pillows, we had dressed in a white slip and utilized for Phil's bed.

"Look out, Phil!" I cried, but the warning came too late; chairs and couch parted company in the middle, and Phil disappeared in an avalanche of bedclothes. When he rose to the surface again it was with a red and angry face, which deepened in tint when I burst out laughing.

"Mad old bed!" he cried resentfully. "Why can't I sleep in a properly bed like you?"

I cut further reflections short with a well-aimed pillow, which bowled him over again, and he struggled to his feet redder than ever, and looking undecided whether to laugh or cry. Finally laughter conquered, and seizing the pillow, he flung it at me, and then the feathers flew. Then he came into my bed, and rode on my knees, and laughed himself nearly hysterical when they suddenly collapsed under him, and kept crying, "Do it again," even unto seventy times seven. Then, hearing Mrs. Binks stirring, I said:

"Now tumble up and help Mrs. Binks with breakfast."

"What are we going to have for breksfus?"

"What'd you like?"

"Baking an' eggs. Let's!" he cried, dancing.

"Very well; and two boiled eggs for me. Off with you."

I heard his little bare feet go pattering down the passage. Half an hour later, when I came down for my cold tub, I heard from the bathroom an edifying conversation.

"And I says to my good man, I says," said Mrs. Binks, breaking eggs into the pan, "I've never stood such goings-on in my maiden home so to speak, and I ain't agoin' to now, an' my good man ——"

"Was he very good, Binks?"

"Good? 'Oo? Me pore dear 'usbin? Oh, good enough as they go—(No, Phil, you can't break no more eggs into the pan; you let the last mess on to me clean range)—but you see, good man is just a manner of speaking, so to speak. Any'ow, he's gone now, pore dear, an' this I will say—(don't be fingerin' the bacon)—you would n't believe the number of wreafs on 'is corfin."

"Yes, I would," said Phil, "if you tell me. How many, Binks?" as usual, athirst for numerical details.

"Oh, I can't exactly say 'ow many."

"Was there five hundred?"

"Five hundred? Good life! 'E was n't the King of England!"

"Was n't he? Where's he gone now? You said he'd gone."

"Oh, 'e was took off, pore dear, quite sudden-like."

"Did the p'leeceman take him, Binks?"

"No, no; he died, I mean, of peumonia, 'e did! It was his sister as I could n't abide, though. Oh, my dear, that woman! It was all owin' to 'er that me and Aunt Susan fell out."

Phil was breathlessly interested. I could see through the crack in the door.

"Oo! was it a cram or a boat?" he asked eagerly.

"Tram or boat? What yer mean?"

"What you fell out of? 'Cos both is very dangerous. If you fall out of a cram, you break all your bones an' a motor car runs over you 'fore you can get up; and if you fall out of a boat, a shark eats you up, and then you're drownded, an' p'raps your aunty could n't swim. Lots of aunties can't, 'cos they don't learn when they're little boys—little girls, I mean—but I can, Binks, with Ruddy's hand under my chin, and both legs like a frog. I'll show you."

"Bless the boy!" cried Mrs. Binks. "How you do run on. No, we never fell out of nothing, but it was a disagreement, so to speak, and her name was Amelia, and since that time I never could abide the name, though you may call me predi*juiced*."

"No, I would n't, Binks, really," Phil reassured her politely, and then I called him for his tub. We had a delightful time. Phil succeeded in getting us both thoroughly wet, and in splashing the bathroom from floor to ceiling, and then, after helping him to dress, and changing into dry clothes myself, we sat down to breakfast with sharpened appetites. Phil ate a surprising amount of bacon and eggs, and when I had eaten one boiled egg, and was reaching for the other, Phil's eyes began to twinkle.

"Don't look for a minute, Ruddy," he said, and I obediently stooped down to offer the cat a piece of bacon rind.

"Now," said Phil, and his small face was dimpling, his dancing eyes fixed on me. Before me was my plate and an egg—something odd-looking about that egg—in my egg cup. Then, calling for the pepper and salt, and with much preparation, I chipped the top off my egg to find only the empty shell, and the time-honored joke was on me. The room rang with Phil's delighted laughter. He never tires of this joke. After breakfast, before the church-goers began to stream past, Phil and I had work to do. Armed with a Dutch hoe and giving him a small short-handled spud, we carefully eliminated all trace of Millicent Lynn from the garden.

"Bother!" said Phil, wiping his hot brow. "I wish we had n't planted Miller in our garden. There 's not a bit of her now. It 's a good job."

But I knew there was another garden where she bloomed perennially, and it was not twenty minutes' labor, a man and a boy, a Dutch hoe and a spud that would root her out of that garden ground.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THERE ARE "REWARDS"—AND "FAIRIES"

PHIL came in one day with a large square missive in his hand, its immaculate whiteness only slightly marred by several smudgy, small thumb marks. This missive he handed with an air of some importance to me, and I opened it solemnly and read in the best schoolmistress copper-plate:

"The Principal and pupils of the Morningside Kindergarten request the pleasure of Mr. —. Ruddy's company at their classrooms on the occasion of the annual prize-giving. Songs, recitations, and exercises by the children.

R.S.V.P."

"Will you come, Ruddy?" asked Phil as I finished reading.

"Rather! Thanks awfully!" I replied gratefully. "Do you perform?"

"Form what?" said he.

"Never mind," I said. "How was it I came to receive this flattering invitation from—er—Miss er—Schoolmarm?"

"That's not her name," said Phil. "She's Miss Dampier, an' she said we could ask three people besides our parents, but I said I had so many parents, an' she laughed an' said to tell who I wanted to come most. So I said you, an' she said 'Is he a little friend?' an' I said no, a big one, bigger'n her, an' then she said I should call you 'Mister'—fancy calling *you* 'Mister'—an' then she asked me how to spell you, but Ruddy, don't you think a teacher should know how to spell *everything* an' not have to ask little boys?"

"Well," said I, as I reached for my pipe, "did you ask any one else?"

"I could n't think of any one but Beenie, and Miss Dampier said I had to think hard, and some one would be sure to come into my head, so I thinked and I thinked, and that old lame man that sells papers in Pitt Street came into my head, so I told her."

"But you don't know him, do you?"

"No."

"Nor his name even?"

"No, I don't; but she said to think, an' I thinked him. I could n't help it. I did n't make my think come to him. What makes your thinks come, Ruddy?"

"Now, now, Phil," said I hastily, "you've lots of friends, I know. Did n't you think," I added with a fine air of attempted nonchalance, "of — er — Miss Lynn, for instance?"

"Oh, yes; she's another parent of mine, of course, but I forgot about her," he answered. "Could I have that apple?"

"Yes," said I, "take it. But about Millicent — there's still another invitation left, is n't there?"

"No," said he, examining the empty fruit stand. "Not one, if you mean the apples."

"No, no," said I impatiently; "I mean an invitation like the one you brought me asking me to go to the prize-giving."

"Oh, you mean another letter," he answered, as he bit thoughtfully into his apple. "No, I gave you the last one I had. There's none left for poor old Miller at all."

"Well, but you could get another," I suggested insinuatingly. "Tell your teacher you've thought of another friend, and get her to write a letter to Miller."

"Oh, all right," he answered carelessly. "Ruddy, where's the cat? I have n't seen him for nours an' nours, an' I think he's lonely without me."

"I imagine not, old man," I answered. "I fancy he saw you coming, and has discreetly retired."

"What's screetly tired mean?" he asked. "Too tired to play with me?"

"That's about it," I answered. "And now you run along, Phil, and don't forget about Millicent."

He promised, but seemed so neutral in the matter that I had not much faith that he would remember. However, a day or two later, he remarked:

"I told Miss Dampier about Miller an' that you wanted her awfully badly to come, and Miss Dampier laughed and said it would be all right, 'cos Miller was a friend of hers."

"Oh, Phil," I groaned, "why did you say that?"

"You told me to," he said in indignant astonishment. "Don't you want Miller, now?"

"Yes, yes, of course I do, but—but—oh, well, never mind."

I fervently trusted Miss Dampier would not repeat Phil's innocent remark to Millicent Lynn, but these girls, with their shy love of mischief in such matters—how far they can be trusted is open to doubt.

"You'll like seeing me get my prize, won't you, Ruddy?" said Phil cheerfully. "I wonder will it be a red book like the one Livy got for her birthday."

A sudden pang of misgiving seized me. Phil, though the dearest fellow in the world, and the most congenial little companion and full of cold-drawn common sense, does not altogether shine in scholarship. He has still a difficulty in distinguishing between *b*'s and *d*'s on the printed page; his *g*'s, *s*'s, and *y*'s are invariably made back to front; he is never quite sure that four eights are not thirty-six, or nine fours thirty-two, and he has only just left off spelling —*d-o-g=puppy*, because the picture corresponding to *d-o-g* was that of an unmistakable puppy of uncertain breed. On the other hand, he will tell you that he can read any lesson in his book with his eyes shut, and can make paper boats and crowns with any one. Still, I was uneasy.

"Phil," said I with some hesitation, trying to be diplomatic, "you know every one does n't *always* win a prize. Perhaps you may not——"

But at the mere suggestion Phil gave me such a look of surprised reproach that I faltered into silence.

"Of *course* I'll get a prize," he said emphatically; "of course I will. Littler boys than me get them sometimes."

I held my peace, sincerely wishing him to be a true prophet. But the more I thought of it the more doubtful I felt, and since Phil counted on it so confidently I could not bear that he should be disappointed. I even had more or less serious thoughts of writing privately to Miss Dampier, offering a special prize to be given to Phil, the anonymity of the giver to be strictly preserved, but that austere word Principal deterred me. Goodness knows what penalties one would make oneself liable to from the educational authorities of New South Wales if one should attempt to tamper with the professional integrity of a lady Principal. But Phil went his way serenely, with no doubts to trouble his confident complacency.

At last the great day arrived. The ceremony was timed to begin at three o'clock, and I left my office at two-thirty, jumped into a car, and was whirled away. When I arrived at the schoolroom I found it humming with light chat. It was fairly full of proud mammas, lady cousins and big sisters in pretty frocks, and a sprinkling of no less proud but more self-conscious papas, and away at the end was a broad shallow platform crowded with children. It was a pretty sight; dainty little misses in a mist of millinery, frills, and laces, and curls and ribbon bows, and a solid phalanx of small boys, fine sturdy chaps in white jumpers; shock heads, sleek heads, and curly heads—and all these little heads restlessly turning and moving like a field of bonny flowers, with bright faces nodding and swaying in the wind.

I had no sooner entered, however, than all these children, in response to a sharp tap-tap somewhere, rose *en masse*, and to the cracked strains of a tinkling piano sang a lusty song of welcome at me. I was overwhelmed. Though deeply sensible of the honor, I am a modest man, and thus having public attention drawn to me filled me with confusion, and I sank into a seat at the back of the hall. As the applause which followed this effort, and the rustling subsidence of thirty or more children into their seats, died into silence, however, reflection convinced me that it was only accident that my entry should have coincided with that song, and though feeling more insignificant I felt less embarrassed. Then I began to look about me for friends.

On the platform I had no difficulty in picking out Olivia Mary's ruddy nimbus, and I felt sure from the energetic nodding of the huge golden-brown bow, which perched like a great butterfly on her curls, that she was laying down the law to some one, and stammering badly. Then my roving eye lighted on Phil, and I waved my hat at him, but he gave me only one furtive smile, and then became very solemn and immediately looked away, so I conceived I had probably violated the etiquette of Kindergarten gatherings, and also became solemn. But all the time I was keeping my eyes open for a pink frock and a large hat with pink rosebuds. And at last, between the fat shoulder of a portly mamma and the thin, bare, collarless neck and all-too-evident collarbones of the lady beside her, I found her I sought, but on this occasion she was dressed in soft blue with a delicious saucy little hat, with a blue plume on it, perched at an angle on her gold-brown hair. As the fates would have it, there was a vacant chair behind, and one also at her side, and I hesitated. Dare I?

The children were now on their feet again, going through a series of extraordinary contortions, with writhings and gaspings; most alarming had I not seen Phil at it often, and knew it to signify "breathing exercises." A fresh, fair, slender young thing was in charge of this demonstration, and I gasped when I heard some one address her as "Miss Dampier." This the austere Principal? But just then a small boy in the front rank of the children was seized with an irrepressible fit of the giggles, and Miss Dampier turned and froze the delinquent into solemnity with a glance, and I saw the Principal surely enough. I rose when I saw every one's attention engaged, and tiptoed down the room and slipped into the vacant seat behind Miss Lynn.

"Good afternoon," I breathed, just to the right of a pink ear shaded by a brown tendril.

I swear these women have eyes in the back of their heads, and an intuitive sense at the end of every hair, for she answered me in a low collected voice, and with not an atom of surprise, and yet I had been watching her, and she had never once turned her eyes in my direction.

"Is n't it—beautiful?" I said, indicating the children but thinking of something very different.

"Wonderful!" agreed Millicent briefly.

"Look at Phil gasping like a fish out of water."

"Hush, don't whisper. It puts the children out."

"I won't if I may sit beside you," I said. "May I have that chair?"

There was no answer. Millicent's eyes were intent on the stage.

"May I?" I persisted in a louder voice.

"Oh, do be quiet. The chair is not mine to give or refuse," she returned in a guarded whisper.

"Oh, I don't want the chair," I said cheerfully, "but only the permission to sit beside you. Please! Oh, don't frown like that, for I shall go on whispering until you say 'Yes,' and when all the mammas turn round and 'Hsh' at us, they'll blame you as well as me."

"Come on then, for goodness sake!"

"For my own sake," I said thankfully, and transferred myself.

"Hsh!" said a tall woman in front of us, and Millicent said "There" in a reproachful and indignant voice.

"There!" said I. "It was you she glared at."

"Your fault!" she said accusingly, and I agreed cheerfully. A prim-looking little boy with a rather large head and large round spectacles now came forward and recited a highly moral "piece" about two little kittens which "began to quarrel and then to fight," and when he had primly concluded, and primly walked back to his seat, a small, rotund, pink person arrived, by a series of wriggles, at the front of the platform.

"The darling!" exclaimed Millicent under her breath, while the Principal said that

"Marjory Ware would now give us a short recitation. Marjorie is three, and our baby."

The plump, pink person aforesaid dimpled and blushed, tucked a fat little chin sideways into a delicious fat neck, and remarked hurriedly to the wings:

"Thwim thwan thwim!
Thwim thwan thwim!
Thwim in th' thwamp; thwim in th' thee
Ower the thee an' bakka dain
Well thwum thwan."

After which she stood and beamed at us, until the Principal called her down. I looked, bewildered, at Millicent, but she was applauding heartily, with every one else. "Was n't she sweet?" she cried.

"Y-yes," I said, "but what was it? Is it Chinese or—or Esperanto, or merely Australian English?"

"As if you could n't tell!"

"No, indeed," I said earnestly. "Did you understand it?"

"Understand it? Of course!" she said, with the air of implying that any one who did not must be a fool.

"Well, I did n't," I said bluntly.

"Do you really mean," she said in a superior way, "that you don't know the old nursery rime 'Swim, swan, swim'?"

"I must plead guilty," I said. "My nursery education must have been sadly neglected. Won't you take pity on my ignorance, and tell me how it goes?"

"Why, every one knows it," she said disdainfully. "The old thing:

"Swim, swan, swim!
Swim, swan, swim!
Swim in the *thwamp*—thwim——"

"Aha!" said I. "You're tripping!"

"Well," she said exasperatingly, "you try it; *you* could never say it."

"I'm sure I could n't," I said, "and I have a new respect for Miss Marjory Ware, but as for that Principal—it could not have been mere accident, but *malice prepense* which set that lisping baby at that particular rime, and now methinks, when I observe her, that she hath a roguish eye for all her principality. Pooh! A fig for these Principals and their principles!"

"Be quiet!" Millicent whispered again, and this time it was Olivia Mary who came out, with great airs of consequence, to sing a song, and acquitted herself quite odiously well, and preened herself accordingly.

"Look, here's dear old Phil," whispered Millicent, and unconsciously her voice had taken on a warmer, friendlier, more intimate tone, so that once more I blessed Phil in my heart as the one bond of comradeship between us.

Phil and three other little boys, smiling broadly, came forward to tell us they were "jolly, jolly sailor boys," with appropriate "actions" to confirm the statement. But from the first there seemed to be a serious discrepancy between Phil's gestures and those of the first boy. Phil was the fourth boy in the line, and my eye kept traveling from him to the leader, and back again, with much doubt, for when the first boy hauled on the pulley ropes, Phil cheerily danced a hornpipe, and when the former turned the windlass, Phil hoisted the "grand old flag."

"There's something wrong," I murmured to Millicent, and she agreed, and a moment later whispered indignantly:

"I see what it is. It's the fault of that third boy—dear little Phil keeps watching him, and he is doing it wrong all the time, silly little donkey!" (Yes, she did say "*donkey.*")

However, no one seemed to mind very much, and they all applauded very heartily when the jolly sailor boys went back to their seats. After that, rather a painful incident occurred. A little girl, very much befrilled and beribboned, came to the edge of the platform to recite. And there she stood, mute as a fish, for some two minutes. She was given some encouraging applause and then she giggled, but still she said nothing.

"Go on, Margaret," whispered a very audible voice from the front seats, and the Principal's cool voice broke in, prompting:

"I once had a sweet little doll, dears——"

"I once had"—(giggle)—"a sweet little doll"—(giggle)—said Margaret, and stopped again. And there she stood and giggled and blushed and blushed and giggled, until the Principal, still with admirable coolness, said:

"You'd better come down, Margaret."

But Margaret would not budge, but still stood the picture of red-faced hysterical distress, until the Principal crossed the stage, took her hand, and led her off in tears.

"Stage fright—a bad case," said I, and Millicent murmured sympathetically, "Poor little soul."

This closed the first part of the performance, and then came the event of the day—the awarding of the prizes. All this time a table had been standing in front of the platform, on which were ranged two rows of books, brave in scarlet and blue and green bindings. Many a bright eye had wandered in that direction, many a speculative one, and now all eyes were turned there as by mutual consent. The Principal tapped on the edge of the table, and made her little introductory speech, and then took up the first prize, which went to the little boy in glasses. Two or three others were handed out to as many children, and every time a book was taken up from the table I could see a half-movement from Phil, as if he expected his summons at any moment. I felt more and more uneasy.

"Well, if he does n't——" I caught myself murmuring.

"He's sure to," snapped Millicent, without looking at me, which betrayed that her thoughts were much the same as mine.

"I hope so," I said meekly, and just then a very resplendent book was carried off by Olivia Mary, coquettishly shaking back her curls.

At first Phil's smile had been one of confident anticipation and at every disappointment he had still beamed cheerfully. He was content to wait. As the pile of books rapidly diminished, however, I thought that the smile grew a little strained, the look a little more anxious. Doubt was creeping in, and I found my heart beating almost as rapidly as his must be doing with suspense and longing. I kept glancing at my little friend, and away again hastily, lest he should detect the doubt in my face. Millicent, too, I noticed, kept looking at him anxiously and back at the table. The sudden removal of a huge hat in front of me gave me a fuller view of the table.

"Hello!" I exclaimed in dismay. "Only three books left!"

"Is n't it awful?" burst out Millicent. "If Phil does n't get a prize I'll never speak to Mabel Dampier again."

"Nor I," said I, although I had never yet done so. "This thing is getting on my nerves," I continued. "Could n't we send round and—and offer a special prize that Phil would be sure to win?—for—for the boy with the nicest smile, for instance, to be decided by vote?"

Millicent looked at me with pitying disdain.

"Don't you know," she said, "that every mother, aunt, big sister and cousin would vote for her own particular boy, and believe it, too?"

"I suppose so," I assented with a sigh. "Oh, I say!"

The last prize but one was being carried off by the boy in spectacles again.

"Insufferable prig!" muttered Millicent vindictively, as that inoffensive youth passed, beaming through his large round lenses. I glanced again at Phil. His eyes were fixed hungrily on the one remaining book, and as the Principal took it up from the table he half rose in his seat. Hope was dying hard. It could not be possible there was no prize for him! Sanguine to the last, he waited. The name uttered by the Principal was not Philip's.

Millicent was murmuring at my side, "A shame! A shame!"

There were actually tears in her eyes. For a moment I dared not look at Phil. When I did, I saw that he was very pale, with a slightly bewildered look on his small face, as though he could not yet believe it, but when he caught my eye he smiled determinedly and bravely, with only a slight quiver of the lip.

"That's all over then," I said to Millicent. "It *is* a shame, poor little chap. But don't take it so to heart, Miss Lynn. I'll take him down town, or *we* will, and buy him——"

"That would n't be the same thing at all," she broke in. "But it's very nice of you to mind so much for him, and to understand just how much it means. Most men would n't."

I glowed at this crumb of praise from one who was not lavish with it as a general rule, and the next moment she clutched my arm excitedly:

"But look!" she cried. "Look at Mabel Dampier."

Miss Dampier was untying a parcel, and this parcel undoubtedly contained books, not such large and gorgeous books, perhaps, as the others, but still books. There was still hope.

Miss Dampier rose and explained that this second installment might be termed "consolation" prizes, inasmuch as they were to be presented to those children who had won no award for actual merit in their work.

The first of these prizes was awarded to Phil Wyndam. Like a flash the red color streamed back into Phil's white cheeks; in a couple of bounds he was at the Principal's side, and all over the hall could be heard his fervent little voice:

"Oh, thank you, berry much! I *thought* I would, somehow."

In the laugh that followed this I could not resist crying out, carried away by excitement and fervor:

"Hurrah, Phil!" and I heard Millicent, as excited as myself, cry "Bravo! Bravo!"

Phil had been making his way back to his seat, but his delight was too much for him, and suddenly he turned and dashing down off the platform, ran to me, waving his book over his head, crying:

"I've got one, Ruddy, I've got one, after all."

And in a moment Millicent and I were shaking his hands, and hugging him, and all three of us were talking at once.

"I *am* glad, I *am* glad, little Phil," cried the girl.

"Well done, little chap," said I.

"Yes," said he, laughing excitedly. "I got one, you see. First I thought I would, and then I thought I would n't, and then I—I—did, an' I——"

And suddenly he burst into tears, the reaction proving too much for his gallant little spirit. Millicent drew him down between us, pressing his little wet cheek against her pretty dress.

"There, there, dear heart!" she murmured. "Don't cry."

In a moment, however, Phil had command of himself.

"Gim—Gim'me a hankershif," he muttered, with only a slight catch in the breath, and Millicent put a dainty bit of lace and muslin into his hand. He scrubbed his eyes with this, and then returned it.

"It—it seems funny," he said, with rather an uncertain smile, "to be crying when you've got a prize, but I—I—just could n't help it."

"I know, I know, dearest," she said. "I nearly cried, too."

"None of the boys saw me, did they?" he asked anxiously, and we both reassured him. We were turning over the leaves of his book when Olivia Mary sauntered up, her big brilliantly-bound book under her arm.

"Hello, Livy!" cried Phil, in a friendly tone. "I got a prize, too."

"Yours is only a conversation prize," said little Miss Disdain. "Miss Dampier said so."

"Yes," said Phil beaming. "That's what it is. What's a conversation prize, Ruddy? Mine's a conversation one."

"Mother told me," said Olivia Mary. "It's the k-kind what——"

"It's the loveliest kind of prize of all, dear," said Millicent. "The kind that one gets, after waiting patiently and cheerfully for a long time, and when one has almost given up hope."

"The kind of prize I am trying for, Phil," I said.

Olivia Mary looked a little doubtful, and then remarked to Millicent:

"You can look at my prize, if you like. It's b-better'n Phil's."

"No, thank you," returned Millicent coldly; "I'm looking at Phil's."

"You look at it then, Ruddy."

"No, thanks," said I, and bent over Phil's book also. A moment later Olivia Mary sauntered off.

Millicent murmured something under her breath:

"Little——"

I am not sure whether it was "prig" or "pig" she said. I like to think it was the latter.

"You're not really trying to get a prize, are you, Ruddy?" asked Phil of me.

"I am, indeed, Phil," I returned. "The one all-consoling prize."

"But mens don't go to school, do they, Miller?"

"Don't they, Miller?" said I in a low voice. "Are n't we in school all the time, suffering the necessary discipline, practicing the necessary patience, hoping against hope that in the end the mistress will relent, and confer the prize which means reward and consolation in one?"

But never a word said Millicent Lynn.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH PHIL HAS A "DOWN-RIGHT-BAD" DAY

IF I have led any one to suppose that my Phil is a boy of unfailingly exemplary behavior I have done his versatility scant justice. Like the rest of us, he has what his nurse Beenie calls his "down-right-bad" days, and it was on one of these days my fate to have the charge of him. Phil is well able to come to my house unescorted, and usually does, but according to Beenie he had been so bad that he was n't to be trusted, so she brought him to my door, since it seemed "no one could n't do nothing with him" at home.

Phil refused to kiss Beenie, and ran and hid in the broom cupboard, but came out a few moments later and wept, because he said he wanted to kiss Beenie good-by, and she had gone.

"Well, it's too late now," I said.

He sat, the picture of crossness, kicking the leg of my armchair, and to cheer him up, I said:

"Let's play draughts."

"Don't want to play draughts."

"What about mowing the lawn, then?"—a

courtesy-title for my strip of grass in the back garden.

"Too hot."

"What shall we do, then?"

"Nothing—don't want to do nothing."

"Oh, very well," said I, and opened a book for myself. Phil threw himself on the floor, and kicked his toes idly on the drugget.

"Why can't I play with your chessmen?" he asked, apropos of nothing.

"Because you left two in the garden last time, and they are ivory—valuable."

"No, they're not. I want them, Ruddy."

"Well, you can't have them, Phil."

"But I want them."

I made no answer, but continued to read. Phil sat up. "I'm going home," he announced. This was one of Olivia Mary's tricks of temper, which Phil would never have originated himself.

"I'm going home," he repeated.

"Good-by!" I said cheerfully, turning a page.

"Are n't you sorry?" he asked in an astonished tone.

"Why?" said I pleasantly. He rose and walked very slowly to the door, his eye on me, but seeing me apparently oblivious, he came back, flung himself disconsolately into an armchair, and remarked:

"I want your chessmen, Ruddy."

"No, Phil."

"Then I'm going to climb on the roof of the fowl-house."

"You must n't do that, old man. I don't want any broken arms and legs, you know."

"But I want to."

I made no answer, and then he spoke again:

"I'm going to, Ruddy."

"No, you're not!"

"I'm going—I'm going now," moving slowly to the door.

"If you do," said I, exasperated now, "you'll know what to expect."

"What?" said he, faintly interested.

"A thrashing," said I recklessly.

A moment later I looked up, and he was gone, but judging him to have gone to work his ill-humor off on Mrs. Binks, I felt no anxiety, until about ten minutes later I heard a scream from that good lady. Flinging my book down I rushed out in the direction of the scream, and beheld Phil hanging head down, from the roof of the fowl-house, his clothing having luckily caught on a nail and so prevented a nasty fall. I got a ladder and rescued him from his somewhat perilous position, and having set him on his feet, exclaimed:

"You're a disobedient young rascal."

His small mutinous face was not a whit abashed.

"He wants a good whipping, that's what," said Mrs. Binks, agitatedly shaking him to rights in his small 'varsity suit —"you naughty boy, you."

A thought struck me.

"A very good idea of yours, Mrs. Binks," I said, and cutting a switch from a bush close by swished it through the air suggestively. Mrs. Binks looked anxious.

"You think it would really do him good?" I continued.

"Well," said she, nervously pleating her apron, "in a manner of speaking, so to speak, suppose for this once he promises ——"

"We must be firm," I interrupted judicially, "eh, Mrs. Binks?"

She fidgeted uncomfortably. Torn between her feeling of flattered pride that I should appear to defer to her judgment, and her very real anguish at the thought of Phil chastised, she was in a painful flutter.

I marched my small culprit to the house, and into the dining room, and closed the door.

"Phil," said I solemnly, "you've been very wicked."

"Yes," said he without a tremor, but eyeing the switch hard.

"And you're sorry?" I said hopefully, quite meaning his admission to end the matter.

"No!" said he gravely.

"Tell me you're sorry," said I, "and we'll say no more about it."

"I'm not," said he, in a muffled voice.

"Now, Phil," said I, wishing myself well out of this, "have you ever had a hiding?"

"Once when I drawed things on daddy's papers he—he——"

"Gave you a whacking?" I said.

"No, but he said he would if I did it again."

"Oh! Well, you're sorry about your disobedience. Come now?" I said persuasively.

He shook his fair head obstinately. "No!" he said.

He was standing before me, rather pale and big-eyed, but very collected. I was nonplussed.

"See, sonny," I said. "You know what a bad thing it was to do ——"

A knock interrupted us. I opened the door. Mrs. Binks, very flushed, was standing on the threshold, breathing stormily.

"You're never," she said, a mixture of pleading and defiance in her tone, "going to beat that little feller, an' him not your own, so to speak?"

"Mrs. Binks," said I with dignity, "discipline must be maintained," and shut the door. I made one last appeal to Phil.

"You're sorry for what you did?"

"No!" The murmur was almost voiceless now. The steady eyes were defiant, the faintly quivering lips set hard. I was at my wits' end how to retire with dignity. Needless to say, I had never the least intention of using the weapon of chastisement, but how to gracefully get out of the business without leaving Phil undisputed master of the situation, I did not know.

"Well," I said slowly, "you know what happens to boys who won't say they're sorry."

I was restlessly drawing the switch through and through my fingers, and at that movement I saw the last spark of hope die out of the boy's eyes. But he stood up like a little soldier, and at a sudden movement of mine, never doubting the hour had come, advanced and held out a diminutive palm bravely. For a moment he stood thus, and then his eyes wavered for a moment, and he said, with a gulp:

"An' there's the lovely v-vase I gave you an'—an'—all the pipe spillers I made you."

"Phil!" I cried, and the switch was flung into a corner. A rush of color crimsoned the small square face, and a rush of tears drowned the great gray eyes. The next moment he was sobbing on my shoulder, declaring he was "sorry—sorry—sorry," and he loved me. The door opened an inch, closed abruptly, and I heard the pad, pad of list slippers going down the hall. Ten minutes later Phil was marshaling all my ivory chessmen on the doorstep. Later on Olivia Mary happened in, and the two children "played house" under the pepper tree with the cat to act as the baby, a rôle which that very wise animal refused to conform to, escaping out of Phil's arms and taking refuge in the pepper tree, with Olivia Mary's diminutive handkerchief still tied round its head for a baby bonnet. Phil gazed ruefully at sundry pink scratches on his wrist, and Tommy, the cat, peered cautiously down through the branches, and Olivia Mary, who had been out shopping, and was now returning with some leaves and shells, the result of her expedition, stamped with exasperation at finding the baby fled. No coaxing, however, would lure Tommy to earth again, and Phil suggested playing motor cars. The two of them made such an unconsciously pretty picture on an up-ended wheelbarrow that I stole inside for my camera, hoping to snap them unawares. But no sooner was Phil in a favorable position than Olivia Mary was not, and *vice versa*, so I was obliged to tell them what I was about, and immediately self-consciousness set in.

"Oh!" cried Olivia Mary. "L-let me run home an' put on m-my s-silk s-socks, an' my pale b-b-blue frock."

"No; you'll do just as you are. Now, Phil, don't look so like a wooden image."

"What's a woody nimage?"

"You are, just at present. Sit up with your hand on the wheel, as though you were really steering a car. Olivia Mary, what are you wriggling like that for?"

She was smoothing down her short skirts, settling her hair ribbon, pulling up her socks, and generally preening her plumage, and then she turned her attention to Phil, who was innocently ready to be snapped from any point of view, though his sock was down over his shoe, and his tie halfway round to his ear.

"Phil is disgraceful," remarked the young lady severely.

"Never mind!" said I. "Leave Phil's jumper alone and stay as you are. There! Capital—cap—ah, Phil! What did you do that for?"

"My nose was tickling," remarked Phil, rubbing it vigorously.

"Well, we'll have another shot. Now, don't move! Olivia Mary, *you* spoiled that one."

"W-w-well, Phil was hiding my new shoes so I thought I'd put them in the f-f-front."

"And come out all feet?"

"Come out where?"

"Never mind, you'll do nicely now. Now—one—two——"

At this precise moment Phil spied Mrs. Binks at the kitchen door, and turned and waved a friendly hand.

"Come on, Binks, quick, come an' have your photo took. Plenty of room—move up 'Livia!"

"For the Lord's sake" said I. "can't you be still?"

"For God's sake," said Phil in paraphrase, "can't you keep still, 'Livy?"

"Have you got my shoes in? An' my ribbon b-bow?"

"You've moved again, Phil, you little duffer," I cried.

"Well, I was only stretching my legs. I did n't think it mattered. Hurry up, Ruddy, have n't you done it?"

"You have n't showed us the bird, yet," said Olivia Mary.

"What bird?" said I irritably.

"What l-lives in the little b-box. The man at the photograph shop has one an' it whistles, b-but I've never s-seen it yet."

I took a couple of snaps, and while getting ready for a third Phil suddenly lost interest in the proceedings, and strolled away. Olivia Mary would have posed for a week with pleasure. The light was failing.

"Here, come back, Phil," I cried. "I want to take another."

"I'm tired of that game," said Phil, shaking his head. "I'd rather play bears. Let's!"

It was hard to resist Phil when he said "Let's," his big eyes alight with a mixture of entreaty and fun, but I only said:

"Come, I want to take you in the barrow."

With a bound Phil was back, under the mistaken impression I intended to take him for a barrow-ride. When the ordeal was over they both wished me to open the "box," as they called it, and show the pictures. When I explained to them, they were both disappointed, and Olivia Mary was chilling.

"My d-daddy," she remarked, "could make p-pictures in a minute if he tried."

"So could Ruddy," said Phil, instantly on the defensive, "if he liked. Could n't you, Ruddy?"

"Well, you see," said I, "they have to go through certain processes—er—I mean——"

"How do they get through?" asked Phil interested.

"Well, I mean we'll have to wait a few days."

"Why?"

"To get 'em developed and all that."

"What for?"

"Run away and play," I said tiredly.

"I'm going to ask Binks for some cake, I'm so hungry. Binks," in a shout, "I want something to eat."

"Come along, then," came from the open doorway, and the two children scampered off.

That evening Phil coaxed me to take him to "Paddy's Market." Saturday night at "Pad's" is the greatest delight to Phil, and he is astounded that I should not avail myself of the exceptional opportunities offered there. Time and again has he urged we should take our pennorth of sausage and green peas, smoking hot, or an appetizing packet of hot "chips," liberally peppered, and he thinks it plain foolishness on my part that I don't invest pennies for myself and him in slabs of pink ice cream, sandwiched between two biscuits. I have never yielded to his solicitations, however. There is a fascination in this big, drafty, garish, many-odored market of the poor for me as well as for Phil. As we enter, and the familiar noises, sights, and smells strike upon our various senses, Phil's hand tightens on mine in delight. He never tires of watching the men and boys, and women with shawled babies on their knees, sitting at the long benches eating their "pennorths" while the greasy-haired "dago," in his shirtsleeves is kept busy, and his wife likewise, in fishing up from the depths of a huge metal can, sausages and green peas, and piling up the never-ending stream of plates; nor of seeing the enormous shallow pans of sizzling fat, in which the potato chips simmer and turn a delicate golden-brown, then are whipped out, poured like sweets into a rolled up paper, and handed across to the waiting customers, after being dosed with strong black pepper, in a way to make one's eyes water only to behold.

Then there are a thousand other charms. Joy to squeeze through the warm, chattering, chewing, loudly dressed crowd, and poke the sleepy parrots in their cages, and to linger at that fascinating stall where the most lovely articles, made of colored beads, painted glass, shells, and plaited straw, are going so cheaply, and the soda fountain with its nickel taps, which for a penny will yield of their delectable store and gush and drizzle a semi-warm, gaseous, ruby-colored liquid, dear to the palate of small boys. The heat and the clamor, the mingled cries of the venders, the mingled smells of old clothes, boots, overheated humanity, oranges, fried chips, sausages, gas escapes, green vegetables, birds, beasts, and sawdust were becoming a little too much for me, when suddenly Phil dragged his hand from mine, and darted through the crowd.

Following him, I perceived he was making his way to a stall of green vegetables, where a trim little figure, with a trim market basket, was turning over a pile of cabbages. It was Miss Ellis, and though she did not see me, the sudden start and flush with which she turned at Phil's friendly greeting told me of the little sordid tragedies in her life, which drove her to market here among the very poor. I would have kept out of sight for her sake, had not Phil hailed me in his hearty young voice.

"Here, Ruddy! Ruddy! Where are you, Ruddy? Here's Miss Ellis."

To silence him, I stepped quickly forward and lifted my hat. The little Spinster, still flushed, bowed primly.

"She was buying some cavages," said Phil. "Why don't you buy cavages, Ruddy? They're very nice ones."

"By Jove, they are!" said I. "But I have n't a basket."

"The lady'll put them in paper, won't you, please?" he added politely to the woman serving.

I interposed hastily to Miss Ellis.

"I believe you get the pick of good vegetables at Paddy's."

"You get them cheaply," said she with a sort of defiant pride.

"And that's a consideration that appeals to me," said I. "Let me take your basket, Miss Ellis."

"Not at all," she said, showing it bulging with green vegetables; and then added, "Where's the little boy?"

Phil was missing, but in a short time we discovered him in front of an ice-cream stall, absorbedly gazing at a small girl aged about ten or eleven, who was partaking of refreshment in the shape of pink ice cream served in a small cup-like arrangement with fluted sides.

"This is Clara," said Phil, briefly introductory.

Clara seemed clothed in a series of misfits. Her right foot was encased in what had once been an elegant button-up boot, in which three buttons now did duty, and her left in a serviceable boot of the style called Blucher, both much the worse for wear. Her skirt did not match her blouse, and her hat did not match either. She took no manner of notice of us, being occupied, except that her eyes, very small, and bright as a bird's, surveyed us steadily over the ice-cream cup, in which her lower lip and most of her chin were buried. We watched her, fascinated, while with admirable thoroughness, and the aid of a very prehensile tongue, she scraped and sucked the very last morsels out of the cup, and then very solemnly devoured the cup itself. Phil gasped. "She's et the cup," he cried in strong excitement. "Did it hurt, Clara? Did n't the china cut your froat?"

"Wot jer givin' us?" said Clara. "'Taint china. It's meant ter be scoffed." But as Phil had never heard of an edible cup, he still continued to regard Clara with wonder and admiration.

"Eat another," he said, to which Clara responded:

"Bloomin' well wish I 'ad the charnst, but I ain't got another penny."

"What would you do if I gave you sixpence?" I asked, smiling.

"Scoff six ice creams," she promptly responded, and I handed it over. With amazing celerity she was as good as her word, and I was about to give her another sixpence, when Miss Ellis interposed.

"For mercy's sake, no!" she cried. "Think of the child's st——. I'm sure they must be harmful in such quantities."

"Garn! I could eat a cartload. They won't do me no harm," broke in Clara. "They're bosker."

But not wishing to have juvenile murder on my conscience, I compromised by buying her a box of chocolates instead, and we passed on.

"Let's get out of this, Phil," said I. Phil suggested pictures, and I invited Miss Ellis to accompany us. This, after some hesitation, she agreed to do, as Phil pressed her earnestly.

"You know," said I, "I'm just as much a boy as Phil where pictures are concerned" and Miss Ellis admitted that she found them instructive and entertaining, and of real educational value. But I noticed that she followed the amazing exploits of Nick Winter with as much interest, and laughed, if not so boisterously, with as real an enjoyment over the antics of Foolshead and Tontolini as either Phil or myself. And, after it was over and we saw her into her tram, there was a soft color on her cheek, and a light in her eyes that made her look ten years younger.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH PHIL AND I FIND WOMEN WANTING

IN the weeks which followed I saw Millicent from time to time, but though she was gay and friendly enough, I thought I detected a difference, a subtle constraint. I went one Sunday to call, and found a young man there, apparently on quite friendly terms with the family, for whom I immediately conceived a violent dislike until I discovered his initials were not the abhorred ones, when he seemed to me just generally tiresome and boring, but harmless. However, he did me a service, for a brass band passing by, he took Phil out on to the balcony and so left me a precious few moments alone with Millicent. After a few polite skirmishings, Millicent said with a pretty little would-be air of "by the way" in her tones: "Oh, Mr. Lingard, I believe I am to congratulate you!"

"On what?" said I.

"Well, first I must apologize for overhearing a remark not intended for me, but your friend, Mr. Wimple——"

"Oh, that!" I burst out, coloring furiously.

"You must let me explain—you really must—I would not for worlds have had you so annoyed. It seems——"

"Me annoyed?" cried Millicent. "Mr. Lingard, whatever can you mean? Why on earth should *I* be annoyed? Why ever should you think it necessary to explain to *me?*"

There was a *soupcon* of haughtiness in her manner, and her cheeks were hot.

"Why—why—" I muttered abashed. "I thought you might—it seemed a—an impertinence——"

I floundered into silence.

"I assure you," she said smoothly, "I am very pleased—very pleased indeed, and I only hope that you and—and the young lady—Miss—Miss Lee, I think Mr. Wimple said, will be very, very happy."

She held out her hand, which I took mechanically.

Miss Lee! I sat stunned. She had not, then recognized Mr. Wimple's blunder as to the name, and for one mad moment I felt actual relief that she should so understand the position. Then, next, in a revulsion of feeling, I cried out:

"Miss Lee! There is no Miss Lee. I don't know any Miss Lee, nor wish to. He—Mr.

Wimple meant—meant—*you*, Miss Lynn. Oh, forgive me for an idiot!" For, too late, I saw my fatal error.

"Meant *me?*" she cried. "On what authority did he presume to refer to me as—as—your fiancée?"

A most exquisite blush passed in a rosy wave right up to the pretty soft hair on her temples, and her eyes were accusing.

"I—I don't know," I said lamely.

She looked at me severely.

"It's very strange!" she said.

"It is," I acquiesced meekly.

"Perhaps he got it from Phil," she remarked with irony.

"Perhaps," I said boldly, "as with me—for he took a great fancy to you—the wish was only father to the thought."

"But still farther from the realization," she retorted smartly, which was no doubt witty but hardly kind, and at that moment that wretched young man came in, with Phil clinging to his coattails.

"They was blowing on about 'leven crumpets, an' a great big drum!" cried Phil excitedly, "an' p'r'aps if we go now, Ruddy, we might be able to march along with them."

We went, but needless to say we did not

overtake them, though we saw them afar off, their red coats and brass fittings twinkling through a cloud of dust, small boys, and yapping curs. Phil was aggrieved that I was firm, and declined to "run just a little," which I would not do even to please my *Fidus Achates*.

After this, whenever I met Millicent I felt the chill in the atmosphere. It seemed to me that, in her resentment at the thought of any undue friendliness on her part having given rise to the idea that there was anything between us, she took pains to treat me with special coldness, and I, on my part, anxious not to presume on the mistake for her sake, refrained from seeking her out and ceased to pay her the attentions I had been accustomed to do. So we "drifted apart." My Sunday visits to Macquarie Street ceased entirely, and though we met occasionally, the old friendly bond had snapped.

About this time, too, Olivia Mary made a new friend. This was one Elizabeth Aschman, aged seven and three quarters, chiefly remarkable for an entire but temporary absence of top front teeth, and a lively imagination. Elizabeth now played with Olivia Mary, and, according to Phil, they walked about with arms round each other's necks, whispering things about him, and looking, as he expressed it, "out of their corners" at him. Sometimes, too, they told him to "go away," or said he "could n't play," or else they "played house" all the time, and made him be the father, while they took all the children for a walk. This negative rôle did not suit Phil, and Elizabeth and Olivia Mary's eternal secrets bored him, and being an indifferent speller, Elizabeth's habit of spelling things she did not wish him to know (and some remarkable effects in orthography were achieved) especially enraged him. Therefore, it will be seen, we were thrown very much upon each other for company.

Phil had another friend, doing his last term at the "Kindergarter." This was Reggie Blair, who was nearly nine, and possessed, Phil would have told you, a real "string" bat to play cricket with, and could bowl over-arm, and had a knife with a corkscrew in it. Phil was inclined to make a bit of a hero of Reggie Blair, and I perceived dimly that, in the nature of things, this rival was more to be feared than twenty Olivia Mary's. Blair, however, being a man of affairs who played cricket and "footer," and did n't care for "kids," but went about with "big blokes" (all Blair idioms faithfully quoted by Phil), did not, as yet, claim an undue proportion of my friend's time, luckily for me, and one Saturday afternoon Phil and I planned to have a dip in the surf. As a promenade Phil loves Manly, to stroll up and down among the gay crowds, and listen to the band play, or sit in the deck chairs and royally hand the man a penny to ride the donkeys, when, as sometimes happened, donkeys were there to ride, and to watch the old man that modeled sand-pictures. But for surfing, real fun and frolic in the briny, Manly was a too fashionable resort for us, and we preferred Bondi or Coogee.

On this particular afternoon we chose Coogee, and arrived early. It was a melting hot day, but on the beach there was a crisp, exhilarating breeze blowing that cut the foamy crests from the waves, and blew the sand up against Phil's bare knees. And how blue the waves were—ridge beyond ridge, battalion behind battalion, snow-capped, chasing each other in eternally, falling on the yellow sandslope with deep, regular thunder, spuming and foaming, and curdling and creaming up the beach, and draining back again in a grinding churning back-wash of foam-bubbles and sand and shells. Phil laughed with delight as the wind tossed his thick, uncovered hair into bright confusion.

"Quick, Ruddy, quick!" he cried, as though he feared the sea might suddenly take it into its head to decamp. We picked our way through a number of sprawling, half-clothed "sun-bakers," stretched on the hot sands and burned brown as mahogany, and so, to the dressing sheds. We emerged again, clad for the cool embraces of Neptune. Phil looked stunning in an absurdly small neck-to-knee costume of blue, with white facings. We ran down to the water's edge, Phil crowing with glee, but there I paused and glanced with some disfavor at the laughing, screaming, kicking, sprawling crowd of men, women, and children that disported themselves in the roaring surf, that plunged headfirst into breakers, that sat waist-deep in water while spent waves swirled around them, or were borne resistlessly shoreward on the shoulders of some mammoth wave, in a wild confusion of kicking legs, heads, and arms, all shouting, screeching, gasping, laughing, while two dogs on the water-line added to the uproar by ceaseless barking and scurrying up and down in senseless excitement.

"Come on in!" cried Phil, plucking at my hand impatiently.

"It looks a bit thick, Phil," I said doubtfully, and glanced along the beach. Almost at the other end I observed a solitary bather, evidently, like myself, disinclined for the social amenities of the surf. Quite in sympathy with his desire for solitary enjoyment of the rare delights of surfing, which is made intolerable by the senseless mob of frenzied, scrambling humans that infest the surf from morn to dewy eve, I hesitated whether to thrust my probably unwelcome company on him. But selfish counsels prevailed. Why should he think to monopolize any one portion of the ocean?

"Come, Phil!" I said, and with his little legs racing beside my long ones we trotted along the firm wet sands at the water's edge, where the creamy spent wavelets came curling and crisping delightfully round Phil's bare toes. It was only when we were quite close to the spot that I discovered, by a very coquettish scarlet cap our swimmer wore, her sex. I stopped in some dismay, but Phil had already rushed into the surf, and still murmuring my right to any area of ocean not directly occupied, I followed. The girl gave one quick glance over her shoulder, and swam away, so evidently resentful that I, who had made up my mind to give her a wide berth, was nettled and swam in that direction too, in mere bravado. Phil was dancing crazily in about two inches of water, being constantly bowled over by playful waves, and rising again, his face radiant with fun.

"Oo! it's loverly—it's loverly!" he kept gasping.

Then I made a discovery. The girl, turning with a graceful sweep of her bare white arms, displayed to me the face of Millicent Lynn.

"Millicent! Miss Lynn!" I gasped, and being in comparatively shallow water, I got to my feet. She did the same, looking distinctly provoked, and certainly very pretty in her trim, smart costume and scarlet cap, her wet, rosy face and pinky-white neck and arms glistening with sea water.

"How do you do, Mr. Lingard?" she said discontentedly.

Our subsequent conversation was, of course, shouted.

"I say, Miss Lynn," I cried, "I'm awfully sorry. We did not mean to intrude, I assure you. I hope you don't mind?"

"I suppose it's no use," she said, and shrugged her shoulders petulantly. "Of course I have no right to monopolize the sea. I had just swum along here, hoping for a little privacy, and it does seem a little singular that even here ——"

"You find the inevitable fly in the ointment," I interrupted stiffly; "but Phil and I can soon rid you of our obnoxious presence."

"Oh, no!" she answered. "I have no right to forbid you this portion of the sea. *I* shall go. I can finish my dip later."

Her unreasonable petulance so exasperated me that I answered coolly, even cheerfully:

"Well, yes, perhaps that would be the best arrangement. As you say, no one has the monopoly of the waves, but if you find too little room for three here, Phil and I will just finish our frolic, and you can come in again later."

She started, and flushed angrily.

"Thank you," she said sarcastically. "No! I shall certainly not leave the water till I have quite finished my swim," and her pretty chin went into the air defiantly. I wanted to kiss her, with her pretty mutinous face all wet and rosy, but instead, I said, with as dignified a bow as I could compass under the half-momentary impact of several tons of salt water against my form:

"Just as you please, of course."

She was turning away haughtily, when Phil called out:

"Miller, how do you think I look in my new neck-or-nothing? It cost free-and-sixpence at Hordern's."

Millicent's face softened. She could never resist Phil, and a smile dimpled her face all over, as she cried, with a ripple of laughter:

"You darling!—you and your neck-or-nothing (I reflected with satisfaction that it was really *my* joke quoted by Phil, but it would never have won a smile had she known), you look just sweet."

"An' Ruddy, too—does he look sweet?"

Our eyes met, and despite ourselves we both burst out laughing, to hide which, she instantly turned away.

"Come an' take me an' Ruddy's hands, and let's all dance in the water an' tumble down flop!" cried Phil, enticing. "Come on, Miller, it's such bosker fun."

"Do!" I urged boldly. "It would be—bosker!"

She looked at me coldly.

"I can't, Phil!" she cried and instantly dived away, floating as tranquilly as a sea bird in the trough of a great green wave. I devoted myself to Phil. We ducked and dived and tumbled, and shot a breaker—at least, I did, while Phil watched delightedly—and we let the great waves hustle us shoreward, and it was good to see Phil's face radiant and dripping, to hear his gasps and gurgles and chuckles of enjoyment, and even when a wave suddenly retreated and deposited him with disconcerting force on the hard-packed sands, his face lost its smile only for an instant, and then he was again wallowing and kicking in the foamy smother. Turning suddenly, I saw with anxiety that Millicent had foolishly allowed the waves to carry her beyond a point which I considered safe, but she was, as yet, quite serene and was adventuring even farther out. I watched anxiously. Rank behind rank, the magnificent surges came ceaselessly riding in, with monotonous thunder, darkly blue, laced with foam, and that little figure all alone out there, with its flash of scarlet cap and gleam of white up-lifted arms, looked pathetically small and lonely, rising and falling, appearing and disappearing in that immensity of dark water. A sudden panic seized me, seeing her so helpless yet so fearless in the grip of the cold merciless seas, that might at any moment snatch her away, and toss her, their sweet broken plaything, far beyond reach or aid.

"Stay there, Phil!" I cried briefly.

The girl was not, in reality, very far from the shore, and keeping my gaze, as well as I could, on the bobbing scarlet cap, where it rode bravely high on a wave crest or sank in the hollow, I forged my way to her, buffeted and flung here and there. Reaching her, I shouted over the thunder of the surf:

"Miss Lynn, it is not safe here. Come nearer shore!"

She shook her head willfully, and there and then ensued a wrangle. We must have looked sufficiently ridiculous, buffeted by waves, occasionally submerged altogether, our words often cut from our lips by the slap of racing waves, shouting at each other, she furious, and I grimly determined, my hand on her wrist, for, finding her obstinate, I had taken the law into my own hands and was firmly piloting her to shore.

"How dare you?" she cried distinctly, in a lull of the roaring surf, and I shouted back, as angry now as she:

"Because I dare to offend you rather than face your father if I did not."

"Let me go!" she cried. "No man has ever dared——"

"No man has ever treated you so before?" I said angrily. "I dare say not."

"No *man* would," was her answer, screamed in my ear.

"D. A. would not, no doubt," I sneered, impelled by some demon of foolish spite.

"Neither D. A. nor any other *gentleman!*" she retorted, and then in an instant I saw the scarlet anger in her face blanche to horrified fear, while her staring eyes were fixed shoreward.

"Phil!" she shrieked. "He's gone!"

I dropped her wrist as though it had stung me, and struck madly, blindly, through the smothering confusion of foam and broken water, now lifted high on a wave, now dropping into a hollow. My brief glimpses of the shore showed it empty of the little dancing figure I had left there. And at that instant a great receding wall of water, drawing back from the sands, flung between us something dark and small and helpless. We both made a frantic clutch at it, but the treacherous wave, that had been his playfellow, whisked it away from us. I was after it as swift as light, and though it seemed an age it was, in reality, not a second before I had the little burden in my arms. As I reached shallow water, and staggered up the beach, my knees felt weak, and trembled under me queerly. I sat down on the sand, but the yellow sunshine had faded, it seemed; the air seemed black about me, and cold; and very, very far off, like voices in a dream, sounded the roaring waves and shouting surfers. I was conscious only of something in my side that beat and pounded with sickening force, and filled my ears with dull jarring throbs, and of Phil's little warm wet body pressed close to mine—Phil, very much alive, and very indignant, roaring with self-pity and rage, the sweetest of music to me.

"Why did n't you take care of me, Ruddy?" he wept. "You said you'd take care of me, and then you did n't."

"I know—I know, little chap!" I cried remorsefully. "I ought to be kicked."

"A shark might have etten me," he sobbed, and a sickening vision came to me of the great Gray Nurses cruising stealthily, out in the bay, with their long evil snouts and vicious eyes.

"Don't!" I cried sharply. "Oh, Phil, don't!" and a gasp that was like a woman's sob took me by the throat. Then beside me I heard a voice, sweet, tremulous, contrite, a voice with tears in it.

"Don't grieve so!" it said. "*Please!* It was all my fault!"

I had forgotten her utterly, but I was angry with her, and still more furious with myself, and I answered coldly:

"Nonsense! I am entirely to blame for allowing a woman's folly to make me forget my real duty for an instant."

I heard the little sharp intake of her breath, and felt her wounded surprise, as though I had suddenly struck her, and the rising indignation which she bravely mastered.

"Yes," she said patiently; "you are right—it was folly—and obstinacy."

I was considerably mollified, but not yet appeased, and her pretty unaccustomed humility, which somehow lent her a sweet new dignity, only made a prig and an ass of me, for thinking to improve the occasion I remarked sententiously:

"If only you women would realize that a man acts for the best on these occasions, and not for a whim. Of course I do not blame you for what occurred, but if anything had happened to Phil——"

"You'd never have forgiven me," she supplied quickly and proudly, and receiving no reply, added softly, "nor I, myself, indeed."

She knelt suddenly down on the sands, and held out her arms.

"Let me have him," she said coaxingly, "just a moment in my arms."

But I made no movement to yield him up to her, and when I looked up she was gone. I was my normal self again now, and was feeling once more the heat of the sun, and the burning sands on my chilled limbs, and the sunlight, that had been a shifting jerky glare of black on yellow, yellow on black, had now settled into its usual dazzling flood of gold, dancing on the sparkling waves and glittering sand particles, and the steady rhythmic roar of the surf, and the cries of the bathers, who had been all unconscious of imminent tragedy, came to me clearly.

"Oh, little chap, you scared me badly," I whispered. And then I carried him to the dressing shed, though he was well able to walk, but I felt as though I could not bear him out of my arms yet.

Later, clothed, and in our right minds, Phil and I sat on the beach together; Phil, his sturdy brown legs stretched out, was drumming holes in the soft sand with his heels and munching buns. He had quite got over his late adventure, but I sat, with one arm round him, thinking over the affair in all its aspects. And my thoughts ran thus: I had been a bit of a brute, and how sweet she had been. She had been in the wrong, no doubt, but that new mood of humility sat so sweetly on her that I must not hasten too precipitately to assure her of that forgiveness which, in reality, I had already extended to her. She would come presently, prettily downcast and wistful, like a child in disgrace, and I would kindly beg her to think no more about it, nay! would do the thing handsomely, even hoping I had not been too imperious and masterful.

I kept my eye on the ladies' inclosure, but Phil, having wrested my walking stick from me to dig holes with, now landed a considerable quantity of sand in my eyes, and when I had relieved my mind on the point, and cleared my vision, she was already standing beside us. She looked delightfully fresh and cool in a seaside frock of white and blue, and was dainty and trim from her smart little sailor hat down to her small white shoes. I scrambled up awkwardly, lifting my hat, but she passed me, and spoke to Phil.

"All right now, Phil?" she asked. "You did give us a fright, you scamp!"

"Yes," returned Phil, turning his bun every way to find a favorable spot for the next bite—"I've been drownded, you know, but I'm not drownded any more now. Ruddy saved me. Ruddy saves every one—don't you, Ruddy? He saved you first, Miller, an' then me."

"Saved *me?*" cried Millicent. "Oh, no, indeed, Phil."

"He was saving you," persisted Phil, "an' I thought I'd better go an' help save you, 'cos we like you berry much, Miller, Ruddy an' me do, don't we, Ruddy?—but a nasty big wave jumped up and knocked me over, an' so ——"

"Oh, Phil, Phil, was it to save me?" Millicent was down on her knees beside him. "Dear little boy—kiss me, Phil."

Her arms were round him, and his, with half a bun clasped in a sticky fist, tightly round her neck, but presently he fought himself free with a sigh, and took a large bite of bun.

"Don't cry, Miller," he said kindly. "I'll give you a bite of my bun."

"Miss Lynn!" I said, and Millicent, with rather an unsteady laugh, rose and faced me. But where was my pretty penitent, low-voiced and plaintive? The young lady who faced me was very cool and self-possessed, with steady dry eyes, and a faint mocking curve to her red lips. And where was my gracious speech of forgiveness and encouragement? Instead, I found myself idiotically mumbling something about a "rough brute," and "could she ever forgive?"

And she, serenely cool, remarked airily:

"It is Phil's forgiveness we should both ask for our shameful neglect of him," and with a friendly good-by to Phil, and a cool unembarrassed nod to me, she passed on. I stared after her, seeing my visions of a pretty reconciliation, tea for three in the tea rooms, and a ride back to town together, vanish into thin air. I sat down beside Phil again, with a heavy sigh.

"So," I murmured, "the breach widens!"

"Say beach, Ruddy," corrected Phil kindly, "not breach. Even the littlest boys in the Kindergarter can say beach."

I was silent so long that Phil, nibbling round and round his bun, in ever-lessening circles, so as to preserve to the last the bit of candied peel on top, looked up in surprise.

"Ruddy," he asked anxiously, "do you want me to a'vise you again?"

It is a pleasant fiction, taken quite seriously by Phil, that I seek his advice on all occasions.

"Why, yes, old man," I answered, "I'd be glad if you would."

"Go on," said Phil, with a sigh, "I'm listenin'."

"Phil," I said, after a pause, "suppose you loved some one very much——"

"You mean Millicent," put in Phil, calmly disdaining subterfuge.

"Well—er—Millicent, or another. Say Millicent for argument's sake." I fumbled in my speech somewhat. "Well, if you—er—loved her—some one, very much, and you had hurt her without wanting to at all, and——"

"If you mean standing on her toe in the water, that does n't count, 'cos you did n't mean to. You've often trod on mine, but you can't help it, your feet are so big, Ruddy."

"Thanks!" I said, half laughing, half exasperated. "But that's not the kind of hurt I mean. I mean hurt her when I was trying to be kind."

"Like planting her in our garden? But she's all dug up now, every bit."

"I'm not so sure of that," said I with a sigh.

"Oh, yes," he returned in surprise, "don't you bemember we planted French beans there. Why are they called French?"

"Because they can't speak a word of English," said I absently.

"Oh! but what——"

Scenting a string of interrogations, I interposed hurriedly:

"But what would you do, Phil?"

"I'd go an tell her I was sorry," said Phil, who was becoming very bored, "an' then if she would n't love me, I'd go an' love another lady. Can I have another?"

"There is no other, no, not one," I quoted gloomily.

"Oh, yes, there is. I saw you put the bag in your pocket," said Phil instantly, but I had not been thinking of buns.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH PHIL AND I TAKE TEA IN TOWN

ONE afternoon Phil and Olivia Mary paid me a visit. It seemed that one of Elizabeth's and Olivia Mary's frequent feuds was on, and they were "not speaking," and so the latter had fallen back on Phil for company, and he, not at all stiff-necked about it, had accepted her return gladly enough, and brought her over to me, as he had promised to help me in the garden. There was a hot wind blowing, however, and though it seemed to affect the children little enough, I was disinclined for strenuous exertion, and sat awhile in the porch, smoking, and watching the youngsters run about, up and down the bricked pathway, which seemed to positively ooze ants from every crack and cranny. The trees swirled and groaned uneasily in the sultry puffs of wind that were growing steadier, and more continuous, like the hot breaths from an opened furnace, and above, a hazily yellow sun stared with a brassy glare from a deep blue sky, over which raced great white masses of ragged cloud. Finally I persuaded the energetic ones to come indoors for a brief spell, as I had no mind to leave them to work their wicked will on my young plants, and I was feeling hotter than was comfortable. With closed windows and drawn blinds, it was slightly cooler indoors. I lit my pipe and threw myself, half-lounging, on the couch, and with one spring Olivia Mary landed in the hollow of my arm.

"I'm going to sit by Ruddy," she announced.

"It's my place," said Phil, flushing.

"I got it first—but!"

"Luckily I have enough sides to accommodate everybody," I said with a sigh, "but personally I think it would be much more comfortable if every one kept his distance."

My mild hint was, however, quite lost upon them, and they coiled up on either side of me.

"You're a naughty girl, Livy," said Phil severely, "and God does n't love naughty girls, does he, Ruddy?"

"No!" said I, dutifully.

"Does n't He love me, Ruddy?" demanded Olivia Mary.

"Not when you're naughty," said I, in duty bound.

"That does n't matter," she returned philosophically, "not a bit. Father Christmas will do me."

I turned away my head, as I was taken unawares by such a candid confession.

Olivia Mary's imperturbable self-satisfaction is always so unanswerable. Phil opened his mouth.

"Tell us a——"

But I saw what was coming, and tickled him in the ribs so promptly that, between gurgles of laughter and squirms and wriggles, the request for a story he was trying to formulate again and again, never got past "oo! Ruddy tell us—oh! Ruddy—tell us a—oh!" and spasms of laughter. And in the meantime Olivia Mary suggested asking riddles, a suggestion which found favor with us all; with me, because it seemed a peaceable occupation, that one might indulge in with little exertion. Poor innocent!

"I'll ask f-first," said Olivia Mary. "Made in Germany—s-sold in York—s-s-stuff a bottle and am called a—a—I won't tell you the rest 'cos you'll guess too easy. What is it?"

"What, I wonder!" said I, with a mystified air.

"Something you put in b-bottles," she prompted.

"Milk," I said, on an inspiration.

"No!" she cried with scorn. "Give in? It's a cork, of course."

"Now it's my turn," cried Phil impatiently, "forty red horses on a white hill—no! forty white horses on a *red* hill——"

"I know that," interrupted Olivia Mary instantly; "it's teef in your mouf."

Phil's face fell so grievously that I said to Olivia Mary: "Now Phil must have another turn to punish you for being so clever," and Phil's brow cleared. But he cogitated so long that she became impatient, "I know one, Ruddy—l-let me say mine now," she begged, but Phil came to light suddenly.

"Little Miss Etticoat with a white petticoat an' a red nose, longer she stands shorter she grows; it's a candle," this last added hurriedly, to prevent the possibility of Olivia Mary's interposing.

"Pooh! that old riddle!" she said. "Any one knows that. Wh-what's a difference between a little boy an' a stamp—don't *you* say, Phil—on a letter?"

"Various," I said, "a stamp does not kick up a terrible row, and yell like a Red Indian, nor ask two hundred questions in half an hour, nor ask for stories, nor jump on a man's chest when he wants to sleep Sunday afternoons, nor——"

"That's not the answer," said Olivia Mary, "will you give in?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"You l-lick a stamp and put it on a letter, and you whip a little boy—it's a naughty boy, of course."

"So much the worse," said I.

"An' make him stand in the c-corner—and now I'll ask another. Phil asked two times."

"I'm going to ask one now," said I. "When is a door not a door?"

This is positively the only riddle I remember, because of my utter failure, as a child, to comprehend why our hall door, which was the particular door that suggested to my father's mind the asking of the riddle, should be likened to a jar, or anything approaching to a receptacle for jam, which was the only jar I knew. Neither of the children knew the answer, and when I told them it gave Phil an idea, for when his next turn came, he began "When is a —" his eye roved, but lighting on me became illuminated — "pipe not a pipe?" he concluded triumphantly.

"When it's alight," I said, pleased with my smartness.

"No, will you give in?"

"I w-won't," cried Olivia Mary. "When it's a weeny cigarette with a g-gold b-band like daddy s-smokes."

Phil shook his head gleefully.

"Give in?" he repeated, pummeling me out of pure lightness of heart. Finally we consented to, and he said instantly:

"When it's a jar. I made that one my own self. Is n't it a bosker one?"

"Huh, you c-c-copied that one!" said Olivia Mary. "Now, I'll make one. What's the difference of a cake of soap, an' a cake with plums in it?"

"All the difference, I should say," I remarked.

"That's not right," she returned, "you can eat the plum one, but you can't eat the soapy cake. Now I'll say another. What's ——"

"What's the difference—I started first—" cried Phil, but Olivia Mary cut in.

"What's the difference of a table an' a chair? Will you give in? 'Cos you sit on a chair and you don't on a table."

"Ruddy does," objected Phil.

"He's not ladylike, then," returned Olivia Mary primly. "My nurse says so. I'll ask another riddle."

"No, I will! Can't I, Ruddy?"

"It's my t-turn—well!"

"What's the difference——" shouted both children simultaneously, but at this I rose, a child under either arm, and bore them kicking and laughing down the hall, and handed them over to Mrs. Binks.

"That's enough!" I cried. "Give 'em something to eat, please, Mrs. Binks, and not a child is to come near me for at least half an hour. I'm going to have forty winks."

"Pooh! I can do that," shouted Phil, and began blinking rapidly, "you count, Livy!"

I shut the kitchen door, and made good my escape. I threw myself on a couch, where I lay idly watching the smoke rings rise and delicately thin to blue-white wisps and shreds in the air. Gradually, out of the pearly haze, peeped a face I knew, arch, charming, smiling. It nodded at me, approached, came closer, closer, then receded, fading, fading, and vanished away. I awoke, hearing the sharp peal of the doorbell, followed by the rush of the children's feet up the hall. There followed the usual wrangle.

"Let me open it, Phil. I-I got here f-first."

"I know how to open it better'n you."

"It's l-ladies first. M-mother says so."

"Gentlemens always open doors for ladies."

This I thought very clever of Phil, as I got to my feet leisurely and strolled into the hall. The bell was sounding an almost continuous peal, and Olivia Mary and Philip were both hanging on to the handle of the door. From without came a small insistent voice.

"Open the door at once!"

Phil put his mouth to the keyhole.

"Who's there?" he breathed.

"It's me," returned the voice.

"It's 'Lizabeth," exclaimed Olivia Mary, and by a strategic movement got possession of the door handle, and the next moment Miss Elizabeth Aschman strolled into my hall. I had met her several times, but this was the first occasion on which she had honored my poor abode.

"Good afternoon, Miss Aschman," I said, and she put a small, limp, somewhat sticky hand in mine.

"Quite well, thank you!" she returned.

Miss Aschman is always so correct that, no doubt, in the circles in which she moves, this, though irrelevant, is the rejoinder polite, presupposing, as is natural, that one's friends are going to be civil enough to inquire after one's health.

"What d'you come for?" inquired Olivia Mary bluntly.

"My mother said you could come to tea if your mother would let you."

"Am I allowed?" asked her friend eagerly.

"Yes; your mother told me you were playing at Phil's, and Phil's Beenie told me you and him were here."

"All right! I'll come, then," said Olivia Mary. "Good-by, Ruddy."

These dear women, who can forget their feuds so promptly—be daggers drawn all morning, and bury the hatchet in afternoon tea and scones at three o'clock!

"Can't I come, too?" asked Phil wistfully.

"No," returned Miss Aschman promptly, "you can't. You're only a boy."

The accident of sex seemed so inadequate a reason that he said hopefully:

"I'll play father an' mind the house."

"No, you can't come, Phil," said Olivia Mary. "Come on, 'Lizabeth. We don't want him, do we!"

I started to speak, thought of the hot blast permeating the out-of-doors world, and sighed irresolutely, but Phil's disconsolate face smote me.

"Never mind, Phil," I said, "you and I will go down to town and have tea at the A.B.C."

Phil's face beamed radiantly, and Olivia Mary looked thoughtful.

"Oh," she said, "I think I'd like that b-best. I can go to your place another day, 'Lizabeth."

"Oh, we'll all go with Mr. Lingard," said Elizabeth sociably.

"No," said I, cruelly enjoying the turn of the tables, "we don't want you. You're only girls—so run along."

"Once," said 'Lizabeth dreamily, "a gentleman" (all Miss Aschman's acquaintances are *ladies* and *gentlemen*) "took me to tea at the A.B.C., and I had fifteen cakes an' two ice creams."

"Did you eat them *all?*" asked Phil, awe-stricken.

"Yes; and after we went to the Fresh Fooda Nice, and I had some more."

"How many?" asked Phil breathlessly.

"Oh, 'bout six or seven!" returned she airily.

"Were you littler'n you are now?" pursued Phil, gazing in wonder and awe at 'Lizabeth's slim proportions.

"'Bout the same," she answered imperturbably, and Olivia Mary observed:

"Once I went to the Civil Servers, I did."

"Is this your droring room?" inquired Elizabeth of me, but as usual Olivia Mary saved me the trouble of replying.

"No!" she said volubly. "He has n't got a draw'n room. He's only g-got this, an' two b-bedrooms an' Mrs. Binks', an' a k-k-kitching, an' a b-bathroom."

"He's got a nice-chest," said Phil, instantly on the defensive.

"We've got three," said Elizabeth crushingly, a statement I had every reason to discredit.

"Oh," said Phil, slipping a consoling hand in mine, a habit of his in moments of mortification for me that so endears him to me, "we don't want more'n one—we wouldn't have enough food to put in three, would we, Ruddy?"

"We always have *heaps* of food," said Elizabeth.

"So do we," chimed in Olivia Mary.

At last we got rid of them, and sallied out. The streets were hot and dusty. Miniature whirlwinds of straw and dust, and odds and ends of papers, eddied and spiraled here and there, and the sultry breathing wind sprang out on us from every corner, with a hot noisy sigh. Phil, too, was rather trying, for it seemed he had registered a vow to touch every veranda post we passed, so great was his care to do so. I felt limp and sticky and grimy, and rather regretful of my good-natured impulse. But once in the cool, spacious tea room, with its white tables and its flowers and its electric fans, or "windmills," as Phil called them, spinning round like quivering vortices of air made visible, I relaxed. It was pleasant to watch Phil sucking through a straw some sweet sticky, ruby-colored compound, in which a lump of ice clinked musically against the glass. I had no ice in my squash, but Phil had asked for a piece, and when the girl had said rather tartly that ice was not included in what she called the "mee-*new*," he had said so sweetly, "I don't mind a bit; I'd like a little piece, please," that she had suddenly relapsed into smiles, and fetched him some.

He made the drink last as long as possible, for the pleasure of drinking through a straw, and told me confidently that when he had finished it he was going to eat his lump of ice. He was immensely surprised to find there was no ice, and looked carefully at the bottom of his glass, wondering audibly if the girl had taken it out when he was n't looking.

"Why is it rude in a house to drink through a straw an' not rude here?" he asked. "Beenie won't never let me drink my tea that way."

Then he ordered a strawberry ice when the girl appeared.

"Strawberry ice off," she answered glibly.

"Did you drop it?" he asked with concern. "I s'pose it's all dirty, then."

I explained, and he was accommodated with a vanilla ice.

He gasped with mingled cold and ecstasy through a generous glassful, and nibbled at his pink wafer biscuits, and then, the inner man satisfied, he leaned back and kicked the table leg while he surveyed the groups at the other tables. There was a fair sprinkling, and the band happened to be playing, and the heart of Philip was content. But suddenly he said to me:

"Why don't we never see Miller any more? I like Miller ever so much. I miss her."

"Hear, hear!" I cried softly.

"Where?" asked Phil, turning right round in his chair, and adding rather reproachfully:

"Was that a story, or only having fun?"

"Phil," I said earnestly, for a tremendous idea had struck me, "you'd like to see Miller again?"

"Yes—an' I'd love to see her dog."

"Suppose," I said wheedlingly, "you write her a letter."

It seemed that Phil did not want to see her quite so much as all that.

"You write it," he said. "I writ the last. It's your turn."

"But I've a bone in my finger," I objected.

"Binks has one in her leg. Does it hurt most in your finger or in your leg?"

"In you finger," I said promptly, "when you have a letter to write."

"But I don't know what to say," objected Phil.

"Say we're sorry, and won't do it again," I prompted.

"But I'm not—I have n't done nothing."

"Well, I am—awfully!"

"Then you write it."

However, I bribed Phil to write the letter after we got home. It was in his words, but at my instigation. I had great difficulty in restraining him from telling her that "Ruddy told me to say" this, that, and the other. It was, in brief, an intimation that we would so much like to see her again, that on such an afternoon we would be at the tea-kiosk in the Gardens, and how we wished she would also be there, and we were "her loving little friend, Phil," followed by several crosses.

After that we went out and sat in shirtsleeves on the back porch. The sun had set in a haze of dusty gold, but the heat still held. There seemed to hang in the air—stagnant now, save for fitful lukewarm gusts that shook the limp-looking pepper trees like the expiring respirations of a dying monster—a dim yellow haze. It was the dust, raised in clouds by the hot wind, and slowly settling again. A cicada with a note like a steam siren was shrilly rasping in the garden, and the busy ants were, as ever, up and doing. The last fitful puff of wind subsided, and the stillness of the sultry air could be felt. There was a hush—a pause. Earth was waiting—man was waiting—expectant of the blessed wind from the south that would soon pour, cool and fresh and life giving, down upon the gasping city. And at last it came. There was a sudden joyful rustle of life in the motionless, hanging leaves of the dust-laden trees that communicated itself to the tiniest twig and leaflet and died away; within the house a door banged—another and another, a canvas shelter began to belly and flap, and with a rush and a swirl the "southerly" was upon us, bending and tossing the branches, and streaming about us with delicious coolness, like a wave of pure flowing water.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH PHIL AND I BLOW BUBBLES

IT was a day or two later that Phil brought me Millicent's answer. I had rushed home for a hasty lunch before going out to Lewisham on business, and was in the midst of it when Phil arrived. When I saw a pale lavender-colored envelope in his hand I laid down my knife and fork, my nicely browned cutlets suddenly losing their savor, but I read the letter with outward composure. It ran:

> "Dear Phil,
>
> "I'd love to see you again, but I cannot possibly come to the Gardens *as suggested* (underlined). You know the way to Macquarie Street, and Gyp and I will be delighted to give you tea any afternoon you can come. Get your nurse to bring you.
>
> "Your friend,
> "Miller."

"P.S.—Next time, I'd like a little letter just from yourself."

In the postscript lay the sting for me, though Phil was innocent of it.

"We'll go this afternoon," he said, prompt as ever.

"But I'm not invited," I said despondently.

"That does n't matter a bit," he returned cheerily; "when I'm not invited I just go, and then I'm there, you see, and Miller always has plenty cakes, so there'll be enough to go round."

But when I had persuaded him that I really could not go under the circumstances, he stoutly declined to go also, like the loyal comrade he is. Finally we obtained permission for Phil to accompany me, and we dashed into a tram, and buzzed and clanged away up to the Central Railway Station. This is always a vastly fascinating place to Phil, the huge, drafty, glass-domed barn it is, with its many platforms, its bookstalls, penny-in-the-slot machines, and refreshment stalls, and the buzz and chatter and clatter of hurrying crowds coming and going, and here and there a brave green palm growing sturdily between the gleaming network of rails, in a foreign environment of smut and dust and steam clouds from the snorting engines.

Inside the carriage, Phil, after narrowly escaping jammed fingers in letting down the sun screen, looked as usual for something to count or spell. It was not a "smoker," out of deference to Phil's tender years, and there was but one notice, which read in large letters:

"DO NOT SPIT. PENALTY £2."

"It says that everywhere," said Phil, running his finger along a dusty slat of the screen and alluding to the prohibition, by which a paternal government designs to check the spread of disease. "It's in the trains an' the trams an' the boats an' the streets. They should have put one in the place what the Spitting Camel lives in, and then it might stop."

Just then the train started with a jolt and a rumble and a creaking of coupling chains, and Phil, being flung with some violence back into his seat, occupied himself with staring out of the window at the incomparably mean and grimy hovels of Redfern and its purlieus, and at the huge yard where the engines live when they are not at work—great sooty monsters without so much as a brilliantly polished copper bonnet to relieve their somberness.

A very engaging girl-baby, aged about two, made violent love to him on the return journey, leaning against his knees and endeavoring to put her two fat little arms about his neck and force a rather damp and nibbled segment of sponge cake into his unwilling lips.

"Nice boy—nice boy, Baba's cake," she murmured with much blandishment. But Phil held himself aloof stiffly. It is a strange thing that at this stage it is lovely woman who makes the advances, and man who is coy, while later the positions, by the irony of fate, seem reversed. Phil repulsed his admirer as gently as he could, edging up to me, very red in the face, turning persistently away from the sponge cake.

"I don't know her, Ruddy," he whispered to me, very uncomfortably.

"Nice boy!" babbled the shameless one. "Tiss Baba!" and put up a most tempting pair of lips.

"Kiss her!" I said to Phil, nudging him.

"No," he said doggedly; "I don't know her."

He evidently considered these liberties most unwarrantable on the part of an utter stranger.

"Never mind!" I said. "She's such a jolly kid. Waive ceremony for once."

"I don 't know how to do it," he said stiffly, and in mercy to his embarrassment the baby's mother, who, with a companion, had been convulsed with mirth, called her, a summons to which she paid no heed, having, not unassisted by me, hauled herself on to the seat beside Phil, where she sat pleased and proud, bestowing amorous glances on the unwilling one. When, at her destination, she was torn from him, she rent the air with her wails, and we could hear her on the platform protesting tearfully, "Want nice boy—more nice boy."

For a long time Phil kept silence as we flashed by the stations with their dazzlingly sunny platforms, green-painted seats, and garden plots bright with flowers, but by the time we reached home he was his loquacious, interrogative self again.

Next day happened to be my birthday, and Phil arrived, bright and early, so early that I was still engaged with the mysteries of my toilet, shaving in the bathroom.

Phil, having learned of my whereabouts, burst in upon me without ceremony, but recollecting his manners, dashed out again without a word, slammed the door, knocked hastily, and without waiting for a summons, reëntered. Under his arm he carried a brown-paper parcel, untidily wrapped and insecurely tied, of which I was elaborately unconscious, such being the prescribed etiquette in such cases.

"I've got a present for you," Phil announced beaming, and as I affected pleased surprise, he added, "Guess what it is."

I shook my head, and he prompted:

"Something what you put on your feet."

Now the shape of the parcel, to say nothing of a large green and purple carpet-heel protruding from the paper, and the sundry hints I had received during the week, might have led a cleverer man to guess, but I, with incredible obtuseness, hazarded:

"A pair of socks" (though anything less like a pair of socks I had never seen). Phil loved to keep one guessing, and it was only his impatience on this occasion that led him to untie the parcel at once and display to my admiring gaze a huge pair of bright-hued slippers, that were surely designed in Brobdignag.

"There!" said he, with pride. "Are n't they bosker? They cost 2*s.* 11*d.*, and I asked the man for the biggest in the shop. Two shillings an' 'leven pence is a good lot of money, is n't it? Do you like them?"

"Rather," I assented heartily, wondering how I was going to keep them on my feet.

"I'm a kind boy to you, Ruddy," continued Phil. "Beenie helped me choose them. You know I wanted to buy you a billiard table, 'cos you said you wished you had one, but the man said he had n't any in his shop, an' he thought you'd like slippers best."

"So I do," I said stoutly.

"But," he said, a little despondently, "you can't have a good game with red and white balls, and a stick, with just slippers."

"But when my feet are cold and tired," I retorted, "I could n't put a billiard table on them, and sit by the fire."

This point of view quite restored Phil's belief in the wisdom of his choice, and he wanted me to put on the slippers there and then and go to business in them. Then a thought struck him.

"I forgot," he cried. "I've got another present. It's a pipe," and he began groping in the front of his tunic for it.

My heart sank. I had no confidence in the judgment of Phil and Beenie where man's chief solace was concerned, and I pictured a pipe that would not draw, with an abominable little nickel grating over the bowl, and a patent contrivance to catch the nicotine, the kind of pipe a woman invariably chooses, and a man just as invariably never smokes. But I knew Phil, and I knew that I should have to smoke his pipe or he would know the reason why. However, the pipe he produced was an ordinary good old clay, with a slim stem, painted yellow. He explained that he had got this kind because it only cost a penny, and also that it would be useful for him to blow bubbles with, when it was not in use for my purposes.

"That's a good idea," I said. "Suppose you have first turn, and blow bubbles."

I argued that the pipe would not survive more than an hour or two of Phil's handling, and thus I should get gracefully out of a dilemma.

"What? Now?" he cried, and dashed off to the kitchen and Mrs. Binks, while I sat down to my breakfast. He returned presently, carrying a saucer of water with a lump of soap in it, at a very precarious angle, his eyes glued on it anxiously.

"She said if I did n't slop—oo! that was an axibent," as a fair quantity of the water splashed on to the floor; "it's her clean floor, too, Ruddy. She's slaving on to her knees from morning till night, an' well she may, with a parcel of men an' boys ——"

I recognized he was quoting verbatim from Mrs. Binks, and I said softly:

"Never mind! Cut into the bathroom and get a towel, and then get out on to the veranda."

He brought the towel, and I covered the evidences of his crime as well as I could, sent back the towel, and having dispatched Phil to the veranda, a piece of toast in one hand and saucer and pipe in the other, I finished my breakfast and after a hasty perusal of the *Herald* joined him there. He was gloriously happy, bubbling and burbling in the soapy water, and watching the multiple little iridescent bells grow from under the pipe bowl. I have always loved blowing bubbles, and I accepted with alacrity his invitation to "play," finding I had some minutes to spare, and in his excited hurry to tell me how far his last bubble had drifted ere it burst, he took a long breath, and with it a mouthful of soap and water, which he spat out with a wry face. We had a lovely time. I don't think I ever saw finer bubbles. They danced, and shone green and blue and rosy, with all the colors of an opal in the morning sun, and when they were wrecked on a bush or gable they vanished soundlessly. We sent whole fleets of them sailing into the still sunny air, large and small, airy crystal-clear spheres, jostling each other delicately, and some of them sailed high—higher than the house tops—ere they met a bubble's inevitable fate.

"Tell me a story," demanded Phil, as a particularly large and iridescent globe daintily detached itself, and rose calmly on the faint breeze, and he thus diplomatically got possession of the pipe.

"Once," said I dreamily, "there was a man who was always blowing bubbles."

"Did he have a little boy?" interrupted Phil. "'Cos grown-up men don't blow bubbles just for theirselves."

"Oh, don't they?" I said. "But, yes, he had a boy—rather a jolly little chap, too. Well, this man went on blowing bubbles all his life."

"Goodness!" Phil took the pipe out of his mouth to ejaculate. "He must've got sick of it."

"He used to blow beautiful bubbles, large and shining, with all the colors of the rainbow, but somehow, whenever they seemed to be getting particularly large and lovely, pop! they burst, and he was very sad about it."

"What's the good? He could easy blow more, unless he'd broke the pipe."

"But one day he made the most beautiful bubble of all, and it went on growing larger and larger ——"

"How large—as big as my head?"

"Yes—and more beautiful than any he had made before, and it went sailing, sailing up into the balmy atmosphere ——"

"*What!*"

"Up into the air. High—high—higher it went——"

"How high?"

"Now, look here, Phil. If you ask any more questions I'll shut up."

"I won't then, Ruddy. G'won!"

"And as he looked at it in delight, he saw, smiling and shining from it, a face——"

"How could he — Oh, I forgot!"

"What did you want to say?" I relented so far as to ask.

"It seems a long way up for him to see—that's all."

"Sometimes it came quite near," I said defensively.

"Oh! G'won."

"But sometimes," I said, sighing, and forgetting the boy beside me, "it retreated very far away, but it grew more beautiful, more luminous and shining, and the face sweeter and more desirable, sometimes gentle, sometimes willful, but always winsome, and by and by he began to see other faces in the clear mirror of his bubble, his own, proud and smiling, and—and jolly kids, with brown eyes like hers, and a house—a jolly little house——"

Phil exploded. He could not keep comment in any longer.

"A house! Goodness, what a 'normous bubble!"

"And then quite suddenly," I said hurriedly, "as he was gazing and gazing, his precious castle in the air, his bubble, broke, and all the man got was a dash of soapy water in his silly eyes."

"It smarts, too, that," observed Phil with sympathetic comprehension. "Still, I think his little boy'd be glad. It was time he had a turn with the bubble pipe."

I looked at my watch.

"Goodness! Look at the time," I cried. "Where's my hat?"

I dashed into the house, and out again, calling a hasty good-by to Phil as I ran.

Phil had very kindly arranged a birthday treat for me. He was to have tea with me, and afterwards we were to go to a picture show at my expense. He had included Mrs. Binks in the invitation, but she had, with very right feeling, declined. When I reached home I found Phil in possession. The first piece of news he greeted me with was that he had broken his bubble pipe.

"Will you buy me another, Ruddy?" he asked anxiously.

He seemed rather hazy on the question of ownership of that pipe, but I was immensely relieved, and so promised I'd certainly make the loss good.

At tea we had little cakes with sugar on them, in a glass dish. Phil climbed into his chair. I had already begun my cutlet, but he reproved me with a glance.

"Grace!" he said piously. "You forgot, Ruddy!"

I laid down knife and fork with a murmured apology, and Phil placed his hands over his face.

"For what we rebout to deceive the Lord make us truly fankful can I have the one with the pink sugar?"

"Now," said I, when tea was over, and Phil was fidgeting to be off, "off you go to the kitchen and talk to Mrs. Binks, while I have a look at the paper."

So off he went, and I took a dip into the paper, but finding there mention of a certain person, who, at a fashionable function at Potts' Point, had looked sweet in two shades of gray, I fell to dreaming of how charming the gold-brown eyes and leaf-brown hair would look in that soft dove-hued setting, and if it ever should become my privilege, how I should adorn that loveliness. The paper slipped from my fingers, and by and by, to my no small surprise and gratification, I found myself composing verses to Millicent Lynn. I had never done such a thing before, but I was vastly pleased with the result. It seemed to me the thing was good, quite as good as lots of things I'd seen in magazines, and for which, no doubt, the beggars were paid, too. This is how it ran:

TO M. L.

We loved in the summer, when the skies were blue,
And sunshine, warm as love, entranced the air,
And Earth and Sky seemed beautiful, for you
Were kind and all fair things seemed doubly fair.
But now the skies are black with cloud and storm.
My skies, alas! are dark indeed, for you
Are no more kind; your love, that seemed so warm,
Is cold and dead, though still *my* love is true.

This was execrable poetry, and very questionable fact, but, as I say, I was so pleased with it that I became quite cheered up, and entirely lost sight of the mournfulness of the theme in my pride and pleasure of authorship. I had just finished mouthing it for the third time, with solemn pleasure, when I heard a small appreciative voice at the door, saying gravely.

"Very good indeed, Ruddy; you said your piece very good. Binks an' me think so, don't we, Binks?"

I turned scarlet. In the doorway stood Phil, and down the hall I heard the retreating shuffle of list slippers.

"Ha!" I gasped. "How long have you been there? Look here, don't you ever dare to say a word about this miserable effusion."

"I don't know what a miserable confusion is," he said innocently.

"This—er—poem, my—er—'piece' as you

call it. Never mention it to a soul, especially Millicent."

"I'll try to bemember," he promised with a sigh; "but there's so many things I must n't tell, like loving her best—but she knows that now."

"She knows?" I cried, and lifted him to my knee. "How does she know?"

He wriggled, and began counting the links on my watch-chain. "Twenty-eight—twenty-nine," he counted slowly.

"Out with it, Phil!"

"I did n't tell," he began. "You know the day I was drownded?" I nodded. "Well, not that day, but the next, Miller came to see if I was quite better again, and she stayed and played with me, an' we played who we loved best in the world, and I said she could never guess who *you* loved best, and she said she could n't, and I gave her free guesses."

"Oh, Phil!"

"She said me, an' I said no; but she was getting warm, an' then she laughed and kissed me about a hundred times, and she said she had guessed now, but she would n't say who, and she would n't tell who she loved best either. You're not angry with me, Ruddy?"

"Angry? No, Phil!" I cried. "You've

given me the best birthday present I've ever had in my life."

"Yes, I thought you'd like those slippers," he said complacently.

So she knew—she knew—and she had kissed him a hundred times, showing, so argued my excited mood, that she did not resent the knowledge. My heart felt as light as a feather, and Phil and I walked to the car, I replying absently to his excited chatter. Before going into the "Pictures" I had limited Phil to ninety-nine questions. He was so conscientious about it, however, and checked himself so frequently, in case he might overstep his limit, and have no question left when occasion demanded it, that I myself raised the limit to 999, and even Phil kept within that allowance.

For myself, I sat beside my young friend with that warm consciousness of content still within, until, gradually, as is my wont, I overworked it, and cold self-consciousness began to whisper that I had so little to go upon in a child's report of idle chatter. Then the lights went up, and the orchestra was rushing at great speed through the national anthem, and mothers and fathers were bundling sleepy children into coats and mufflers, and the place looked suddenly dusty and sordid and garish, with a litter of empty chocolate boxes and wrappers on the floor, and the fast-emptying seats.

"Come on, Phil," I said, "let's get out of this," and was a little sharp with him, because he would dive under a seat after a piece of silver paper out of a chocolate box. Phil was unwontedly subdued, and looking at his little sober face, as he sat in the car, I felt sorry.

"What are you thinking of, old chap?" I asked.

"I was thinking I found a horseshoe to-day, and spitted on it, but I have n't had any luck yet, like finding gold or silver things."

But just as we were leaving the car, by a strange coincidence there was a silver sixpence shining at his feet. True, I had to maneuver to get him to see it, but he was so delighted that he turned to me with a beaming smile.

"The very next horseshoe I find I'll give to you, Ruddy, to spit on, and you'll have luck an' find the thing you want most."

"I wish you'd find that horseshoe quick then," I sighed.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH WE COME VERY NEAR TRAGEDY

ONE day Phil came in and told me a bit of news that interested me. It was that Millicent Lynn had engaged him for the following afternoon. She had rung up, and asked if she might take him out, and his mother had said yes, and then Millicent had asked for him, and he had spoken to her at the telephone. She had asked him if he would like to go to Manly, and by tram round to the Spit, where they could cross in the punt, and so to Mosman Bay, and back to Circular Quay. But, it appeared, Phil had very politely but firmly intimated that he would prefer to take a trip in the "Seeing Sydney" motor car. She had laughed, he said, but said very well, there was nothing like knowing what one wanted.

"Then," said Phil, "she said, 'If you can't come, you must just give me a ring to-morrow morning,' so you see, Ruddy, I'll have to go, 'cos I could n't buy her a ring. I have n't enough money."

"A ring?" said I. "I wish I had your chance, Phil, but she would n't accept one from me."

I adroitly got from Phil the hour of starting, and perhaps it was mere coincidence that I should be standing on the post-office steps, overlooking Martin Place, just as the chimes overhead burst forth musically, followed by two mellow, booming strokes. The large touring car, with its staring inscription "Seeing Sydney," was standing outside the Tourist Department Offices across the way, and I strolled over. It was a bit before its time for starting, and the chauffeur was chatting to the taxi-cabmen on the stand, and only two passengers were, so far, aboard, Phil and Millicent. I knew Phil's over-punctual habits, and really admired the pertinacity he must have exercised to get a lady to be so much beforehand. He saw me as I crossed the street, and with a delightful shriek of:

"Here's Ruddy! He's coming, too!" stood up and waved to me. I crossed over, and lifting my hat, leaned my arms on the edge of the car to speak to my friends. Phil hailed me with delight, but Millicent acknowledged my salute with a bow and a coldly conventional smile, and answered my remarks civilly, but without enthusiasm.

"Get in—get in," cried Phil hospitably, "plenty of room."

I hesitated, looking straight at Millicent, but she was busy, protecting her pretty white frock from Phil's dusty restless little boots, and would not meet my eye.

"Don't you want to come?" asked Phil, astonished.

"Very much," I said.

"Then get in—people'll be taking all the seats soon."

"But," said I boldly, "will Miss Lynn allow me!"

"Course you will, won't you, Miller?" said Phil easily.

"Mr. Lingard knows well enough, Phil," answered Miss Lynn coldly "that this is a public conveyance."

"A *what?* It's a motor car," said Phil.

"Well," she cried impatiently, "it isn't *my* car, Phil, and if Mr. Lingard chooses to use it I have nothing to say one way or another."

"Ah, but," said Phil, with unexpected shrewdness, "I s'pect he wants you to say you'd like him to come. Do say it Miller," he coaxed.

"Do say it, Millicent!" I pleaded in a low voice, but she said nothing. Only a slight tinge of color crept into her smooth cheek, and she looked straight ahead. I straightened up suddenly, with a laugh entirely without mirth.

"Well, good-by, Phil—I'm afraid there's not room for me, after all. Hope you have a good time. Good afternoon, Miss Lynn," and, lifting my hat, I turned abruptly away, sore and angry and humiliated. Before I was out of earshot I heard Phil's voice, quivering with the indignant tears he was trying to restrain.

"Now, he's gone. I won't love you any more, Miller. You're not kind to Ruddy, and I won't go if you won't let him come, too."

"Oh, Phil!" she exclaimed in a hurt voice, "and this was to have been *our* treat—just yours and mine!"

I heard him calling, "Ruddy! Ruddy!" but I would not turn or stop. There was a fine flame of wrath in my heart, and pain, too. This was the final bursting of my bubble, and I could never again dwell, in pensive mood, upon its tender colors of hope and love. So I strode across Martin Place. A taxi turning out of Pitt Street, and making for its stand, was coming down with a smooth rush and purring hum of rapid wheels, and what followed seemed to happen in one confused moment of horror.

The cry of "Ruddy, wait! I'm coming!" the frantic raucous "honk" of the motor horn, a piteous cry, and a hoarse horrified shout from some one. Too late. The swift, smoothly moving monster with humming wheels seemed to leap on that little pathetic figure with its bright uncovered hair—the little figure that went down, tossed aside by the great car that swerved desperately, and came to a stand in its own length with grinding brakes. I was kneeling, with Phil's little motionless figure in my arms. One sturdy arm hung limply, there was dust on his white clothes and bright hair, but his face and head seemed uninjured, and his eyes were only half closed, showing a gleam of light from under the long lashes. The usual crowd gathered as though by magic, pressing and peering. I was dimly conscious of a policeman with a notebook, and the chauffeur, who repeated over and over: "He run right acrost me, the pore kid did. I done me best!"

Vaguely I heard the roar of George Street close by. I smelled the strong, smoky stench of petrol, and a wave of rich exotic perfume of carnations from the flower sellers' barrows, that, till the day I die, will be associated in my mind with the horror, and fear, and pain of death. I heard a woman in the crowd:

"Look at the father—pore feller!—ain't 'e cut up?"

Some one called out the doctor was coming, and then beside me I heard a voice, even, calm with utter despair: "He is dead. I have killed him. I have killed little Phil."

I looked up. Millicent stood there, white as a flower, her dark eyes tragic with suffering. They hurt me—those eyes!

"Nonsense!" I cried out angrily. "Phil is not dead."

Then the doctor came, and we carried the boy into one of the offices close by, shutting out the curious crowd. We telephoned for the mother and father. The mother was out—at a bridge party, the maid thought, but would do her best to find her. The father arrived in ten minutes—a tall, thin, silent man, Phil's father, reserved and undemonstrative. I had sometimes wondered if he really appreciated Phil, was as proud and glad as he ought to be that he was the father of such a son. He said little, only a few low-voiced questions, and then he took his place beside his son, his eyes riveted on the doctor's face. The latter worked in silence, making a swift, deft examination. Millicent, still with colorless face and tragic tearless eyes, did all his bidding in silent obedience, while he temporarily bound up the injured arm. And still Phil lay in that deathlike trance, with neither sigh, nor moan, nor movement, and still the father watched the doctor's face with a dumb inquiry, and the doctor's face was grave enough. I fought with a paralyzing fear as I marked its deepening gravity. A clock on the office wall ticked in the silence, and outside the clamor of the chimes at the three-quarter broke out again. Not an hour, and such a change to be wrought! Then suddenly came a rush of feet, a sharp rap at the door, and there rushed into the room, with a silken rustle, a tap-tap of high heels, a jingle of ornaments, and a breeze of perfume—Phil's mother.

"My boy—my precious boy, my little Phil!" she cried hysterically, and would have flung herself on the unconscious little form, but the doctor cried sharply:

"Keep that woman back," and her husband caught and held her.

"Hush, hush, my dear!" he said, his arm about her.

Suddenly she saw me, and cried out fiercely, accusingly:

"Oh, Mr. Lingard—how could you! I trusted you, and this is the way you look after the boy you seemed so fond of. Why did I ever let him out of my sight? But I thought I could trust you!"

"Hush, hush!" said her husband, once more, but she would not be silenced, in her sobbing reproaches. "I will never trust you again, Mr. Lingard. Oh, how could you?"

"I am sorry, very sorry," I said mechanically, fearful lest Millicent should hear. The woman had evidently forgotten that Phil was not in my charge that day.

"Sorry?" she burst out—I, myself, had thought drearily how limited a language was that, that must express the anguish of remorse for an irreparable tragedy in the same words as regret for some trifling offense—"what good does that do now with my boy lying there, injured, perhaps dying? If Phil dies——"

A gray shadow passed over the man's face, aging it incredibly, and he closed his eyes a moment. Then in a low, authoritative voice he said to her:

"No more, my dear! Mr. Lingard," he continued, "my wife is overwrought. You will forgive her words. We know how kind you have been to our boy, and that no neglect of yours brought this about."

I gripped his hand, muttering with difficulty.

"I would have—died, to save you this."

"I know—I know!" he said kindly, and shifted his patient gaze to the doctor again.

Then I was aware of Millicent, that white wraith of Millicent, with the woeful eyes, beside us. She spoke to Phil's mother:

"Do not blame Mr. Lingard, for it was——"

"Quick!" I cried, "the doctor wants you," and she turned and hurried back, her self-reproach unuttered. I sighed with relief. It seemed that beyond the arm there were no bones broken, but there was very serious concussion and, it was feared, a bad fracture of the skull. They took him away, and the crowd having melted away, too, we found ourselves, Millicent and I, drawn together by sorrow in a way that nothing else could have done, left staring with unseeing eyes into the great concave windows of the Tourist Office. The sunny street was filled with life and bustle, but in our hearts was desperate fear.

"You were splendid—in there!" I said, at last, hoping to wipe that stricken look from the girl's white face, by this small comfort.

"Splendid!" she echoed drearily, and then burst out with sudden passion, "Why—why—what right had you to take my blame upon yourself? Have I not enough to bear that you should thrust this added weight of remorse upon me?"

"And I,"—I said, "if you will take this blame upon yourself—have I not something to bear, too, when you refuse to let me help you bear your trouble?"

She caught her breath.

"Oh, you are generous," she said, "but—but why don't you say what you *must* be thinking? I deserve it, oh, yes! I deserve it all—that this is twice I have brought to danger and death, by willful obstinacy and selfishness, the little child we both love."

"Why should I say that?" I asked gently. "Even if I thought it, and God knows I do not, have you not enough to bear, as you have said?"

"Oh, you are good to me—good!" she said chokingly. "But if Phil dies——"

Always came that dreadful significant pause at the bare thought. We parted soon after, with a lingering handclasp, for she begged me to leave her, and with a heavy heart I took my way to the office. But I could not work. Phil's merry face came between me and my tasks, and then his face, as I had seen it last. There was a snapshot of him with Terry, I had taken, and always kept on my desk; there were two chairs in the corner, harnessed together with string, where he had played horses the last time he had been at my office, and even the mournful squeak of the lift as it ran up and down was a reminder of him, he had always been so concerned about it. Over the telephone I had already heard that there was no change in Phil's condition. Another doctor had been called in, and it was feared an operation would be necessary. Some pressure on the brain was suspected. Yes, it would be a serious operation, but there was the chance—the bare chance. It seemed I sat there a long time—thinking—thinking—staring idly into space, when I heard a gentle tap at my door, and Miss Ellis entered.

"Oh!" she cried, trembling, "have you any further news? I have just left Millicent Lynn. Oh, that dear little boy—will he die?"

"I—don't—know," I said heavily, and told my news briefly.

"Millicent is in such dreadful grief," she said. "She sits thinking and thinking with dry eyes. If she would only cry it would not be so—so—dreadful."

The little Spinster wiped her eyes, and her voice trembled as she continued:

"She blames herself so, poor girl. She says it happened all in a moment. She did not dream he would follow you when—when—she said, 'Oh, very well, if you'd rather be with Mr. Lingard, go with him.' She said Phil left her side in an instant, and before she could reach the street, the—the awful thing had happened."

She shuddered, and hid her face in her hands a moment. Then she went on waveringly:

"I am growing old, and had never known the love of a little child till Phil came into my life. I had no patience with children, but Phil taught me how much a child can mean to a woman. He never seemed to notice how old and sharp and forbidding I had become—he never shrank from me as I have seen other children do, and I think that is why I shrank from them, for fear of a rebuff, for a childless woman is very fearful of the rebuffs of a child. And how he loved you, Mr. Lingard. He said when he grew up he meant to be just like you, and——"

"Don't!" I groaned, and dropped my head upon my crossed arms on the desk. There was silence for a space, and then I felt a very gentle hand upon my bowed head.

"Poor boy!" came a very tender voice above me—"only a boy after all, another Phil not so very, very many years ago. But keep up, dear boy, for all our sakes—*for Millicent's sake!*"

These last words she breathed just against my ear, and then she stole away, but it seemed to me that a special, sweet significance hung like an aroma about them, and, for the first time, a faint pencil of light stole divinely across the gloom, while very, very delicate and wan and aloof, my bubble rose and floated again before my eyes. Returning home, at my gate, a little figure in blue, with bright hair and tumbled ribbon, flung itself into my arms. It was Olivia Mary, and sobbing as if her heart must break. All her little airs of consequence and willfulness were gone. And, as I held her there, her little wet cheek warm against mine, her clinging arms about my neck, she sobbed stormily:

"Oh, is Phil going to die, Ruddy? Will he die?"

All my ancient antagonism faded, and to me she was no longer the autocratic Olivia Mary, but just a dear little girl in trouble, and my heart warmed to her, as I carried her indoors.

Some one had told her of Phil's accident, and that he was going to die.

"Oh, Ruddy," she wept, "I l-love Phil b-best of all the chil'rens at the Kindergarter—better than 'Lizabeth. If he gets better I'll give him my Coronation m-medal. Is he going to die?"

"Die? Phil? Not a bit of it," I said sturdily, but Mrs. Binks who had come in to arrange the table, very red-eyed and sniffing, shook her head pessimistically. She had heard the news, it appeared, from the baker's boy, with embellishments. Mrs. Binks had no love for Olivia Mary, considering she "put upon" Phil, but seeing the child's genuine grief she so far softened as to present her with a piece of plum cake.

"There!" she said, as Olivia Mary, sufficiently recovered to take languid bites at the dainty, though still shaken with an occasional hiccough of emotion, sat up on my knee.

"That's a bit of his very own cake, the blessed lamb! I always made a special one for him on baking day—'e relished it so—not that it's likely 'e'll be wantin' any more o' my cakes where 'e's a-goin', poor little dear!"

"Nonsense!" I said. "Phil will live to make many, many more of your cakes look foolish, Mrs. Binks."

"I only 'ope it may be so," rejoined Mrs. Binks gloomily, shaking her head, "but there was my cousin's sister's 'usband's child, 'er marrying a widower, so to speak, took off at Phil's age, with a operation, and 'sides, that boy's such an angel—too good to live! I've always said it, and now this proves me words."

"Meaning Phil?" I cried. "Why, Mrs. Binks, and the times you've said you never saw such a boy for bringing dirt into your clean kitchen, and picking the currents out of your current scones, and leaving the tap at the sink running, and—oh, don't you worry about Phil!"

"And, I suppose," remarked Mrs. Binks with heavy sarcasm, rearranging for the twentieth time my cup-and-saucer, "as you're not worrying? Oh, no! Not at all!"

"Worrying?" I lied. "Dear me, no!"

"Then may I h'ask," retorted Mrs. Binks crushingly, "as to why you 'ave not took one morsel of my good dinner yet, and it on the table this ten minutes, an' steak an' kidney pie, as is well known to be your favorite, deny it, if you can, an' you as a rule that 'ungry you've been known to sit down to your dinner before it's out of the h'oven, so to speak—*you* are not worrying—oh, no, not at all!"

With which, wiping her eyes on her apron, Mrs. Binks left the room, triumphant.

Olivia Mary having assured me her whereabouts was known, I invited her to pour out tea for me, which important office almost restored her to her normal self-possession. She sat on Phil's special chair, his own cushion, and in his particular place, because I had such a morbid shrinking from sitting there. So there she sat, pouring out tea, and letting a generous quantity dribble on to "Binks' clean cloth," as Phil would have said, having caught the trick from that lady, who always spoke, as it were, in the possessive case, as "my floors," "my clean steps," "my kitchen."

For myself I could not eat, and ashamed to let Mrs. Binks triumph over my untouched plate, I sneaked off with Olivia Mary and took her home, before calling again at Phil's house.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH MY FRIEND PHIL APPROACHES THE VALLEY

PHIL'S Beenie opened the door to me, her face red and swollen with weeping. It seemed that all my little world went about, just now, red-eyed and tearful, excepting always that white, tearless girl whose grief was deepest. In a voice choked with sobs, Beenie told me there was still no change. The doctors were with him. I asked if it would be possible to see him. I had a great desire to see Phil once again, before the surgeon's tools had touched him, and this, deep down in my heart I knew was because of the unacknowledged fear of what might be left, after those tools had done their worst—or best.

"Ask the nurse—there's a good girl," I said to Beenie.

"Her," she flushed angrily (it was evident the poor soul was miserably jealous); "as if I could n't look after my little boy better than her who's nothing but a stranger; an' me who come to the house when I was sixteen, an' him in long clothes, and such lace on his robes ——"

Poor Beenie choked. It was evident that the memory of the lace on his robes had some mysterious power to make her heart bleed afresh.

"Poor Beenie!" I said pityingly, "I'm sure he'd choose you if he could, but these nurses ——"

"You think he would?" cried the girl, catching at my hand. "Oh, bless you for saying that! I don't mind so much now."

And she hurried off. Presently a pleasant-faced, white-capped nurse came to me. Her eyebrows went up in a surprised smile when she saw me.

"Why," she said, "the little maid told me Phil's greatest friend was here, and I expected to see ——"

"Some one Phil's own age," I said. "But it is true; and it would not seem strange to you if you knew Phil."

She answered my questions. The doctors were with him now, and the operation would be performed almost immediately—yes, a serious one—but—there was always the chance—might I see him?

She looked doubtful, but a door opening above us, she bade me wait while she asked the doctor. The latter, a man I knew came down to me.

"Why, yes," he said. "No harm in your seeing the patient, but I warn you, Lingard, he won't know you. He still lies in the same comatose state."

Again, with my tongue grown thick and stammering, I put the fateful question. He looked grave. "Impossible to tell," he said, "till after the operation. I may say he has a chance—a fair, fighting chance. A pity—a great pity, the whole thing. A fine little chap, too."

I followed the nurse up the stairs, my heart beating in slow heavy throbs. How often I had seen Phil come dancing down these stairs, or, if Beenie was not about, risking his neck on the bannisters. Already over the house seemed to have fallen the hush of death. The doctors were in a further room, making their preparations. They had taken Phil from his bed, and had laid him on a hastily improvised operating table, and I shuddered at the white sheet drawn up to his chin. He was lying as I had last seen him, his bandaged arm strapped across his breast, his thick, fair hair fallen back from his white forehead, and still with that slight gleam from between the lowered lids and thick lashes. With a lump in my throat, I walked silently from the room again, and went slowly down the stairs. At the foot of them I paused. On the hall table a parcel was lying, clumsily wrapped and tied, and on the wrapper, in large printed capitals was the uneven inscription: "RUDDY — FOR GOOD LUCK."

I picked it up, wondering at the weight. Untying it, I found it to be the horseshoe Phil had promised me. It was heavy indeed, but, as, with a strange superstitious hope, I thrust it into my coat pocket, my heart felt a little lighter. Something whispered Phil would not die while I carried his charm, his talisman, about with me. Suddenly, somewhere close to me, I heard a sigh, almost a groan that seemed to be wrung from the depths of some suffering soul. Involuntarily glancing in its direction, I perceived through an open doorway the figure of a man with bowed head laid upon his crossed arms—Phil's father. And as I glanced, that heavy sound came again. I was about to tiptoe away, when he raised his head and saw me, and rose to his feet. He seemed to have aged years.

"Ah, Lingard!" he said. "Come in—come in—you've been to see the last of the little chap?"

"The last?" I cried. "By God, no—not the last, I'm sure of that!"

"They're beginning their butcher's work soon," he said bitterly. "And when they've done with him, God knows what will be left—an idiot perhaps—or a corpse."

But I would not hear of either, and talked glibly, though my ignorance was profound, of the successful operations that had been performed on the brain, and though he still looked dejected, I could see he listened eagerly, anxiously, willing to be persuaded. After a time he said, in a more natural tone, quiet and kind:

"You must pardon me, Lingard, for my—my morbid talk just now. And I want to say to you, whatever happens, and my wife would echo me, only that she being so overstrung, naturally, the doctor thought it best she should take a sedative, and she is now mercifully unconscious of what I—well, as I say, we want you never to reproach yourself with all this. We know how good you've been to our boy, and how the little chap adored you—a case of hero worship. I've never said much, but I've felt grateful and—and—how I have *envied* you."

"Envied *me?*" I echoed. "But how much more have I envied you to be the father of such a boy as Phil."

"Don't say that," he cried harshly. "Never pray, as I prayed, for a son. I married later than most men, and we were married five years, and childless—my wife——" He stopped abruptly, and then went on hurriedly: "Never long for a son as I did, lest, like me, you should come to feel the mental pain that I have now, in fearing to lose him. Yes," he continued more quietly, "I have envied you because you have been able to give him what I could never give him—comradeship, fun, and understanding. Phil cares for me, in a way, of course, but it is to you he turns for sympathy. You are to him 'one of us,' between you the freemasonry of friends; between us there is a gulf fixed, and —and his mother, poor girl, has so many outside calls on her time and attention, and she does not—understand children. I am a lonely man. I'd have given worlds to know my son as you know him, but as yet he is too little to comprehend. I had hoped that as he grew older, we would draw together, but, now——"

With a hopeless gesture he turned away, and I saw in all its pathos the tragedy of the lonely self-repressed man whose wife was a butterfly, and his son "too little to comprehend."

Suddenly he turned to me, an almost eager look in his eyes:

"I wonder—would you care——" He

was fingering a key on his watch-chain, and hesitated.

"Yes?" I said grimly.

"I'm an old fool, perhaps," he said grimly. "But you love the boy, and I think will understand."

He unlocked a cabinet standing against the wall, and beckoned me.

"Woman's work—mother's work," he muttered, shaking his head. "But she—did not understand—and some one had to——" He paused, looking at me. The contents of the cabinet made up such a collection as mothers love to hoard up and fondle, long after their little ones are grown, and flown the home nest, a tiny pair of shoes with rubbed toes, a tress of flaxen hair, soft and straight, an ivory rattle with silver bells, a picture of a laughing year-old baby with Phil's merry eyes, and soft thick hair. There were other things in that sacred cabinet, and as, with pathetic eagerness, he took them out one by one, and laid them in my hands, I felt the pitifulness of the abandon with which this sternly reserved nature poured out the treasures of his soul to me, with that utter unreserve that only such a nature can give way to, once the barriers are down. There was a drawing of Terry, executed by Phil, and dated by his father's hand, Terry with an uncomfortable number of legs, it seemed to me, and misplaced eyes, but the father said proudly:

"Crude, of course, but I thought it showed promise."

There was a picture postcard sent and addressed by Phil, when the boy had been away on a holiday, and a gayly worked tobacco pouch, a present from Phil, and a little, very dingy cloth rabbit, with all its stuffed legs limp and broken.

"That," almost whispered the father, "he took to bed with him every night when he was younger. 'Rabby,' he called it, and if at bedtime it could not be found the whole house was roused until it turned up." He smiled, smoothing the dingy thing tenderly. "I found the poor old thing in the rubbish box, not long ago, and, it was foolish, I suppose, but I could n't bear to let it go. Phil's forgotten his old friend, but it brings back to me the picture of the little chap in his little white gown, coming from his bath to say good night, his 'Rabby' clasped in his arms."

Other trifles there were, exquisitely painful to look upon, and lastly, the father, half shamefaced, half eager, put it in my hands, a notebook. It was a pitiful enough record of trifles, with such entries as these, all dated:

"Phil cut his first tooth: age, 6 months, 3 weeks."

"Had Phil's photo taken: age, 7 months. Photographer remarked on his splendid limbs."

"Phil said Daddie (?) (or perhaps doggie): age, 9 months. (Two days later): 'Daddie' quite distinctly."

"Phil took four steps alone to-day: age, 10 months 3 days."

"Bought Phil's first pair of boots: 3 years old."

"Phil started school to-day. (5 years 6 months)."

"Phil's first fight: Bravo! Bravo!"

"Note: Some doubt as to which way the victory went—but still a fight."

The last entry was less than a week back, and was this:

"Measured Phil to-day: Height 3 ft. 9 ins. tall and broad for his age, viz.: 6 years 7 months."

As the blank pages fluttered beneath my fingers, I could not help wondering what the next entry might be. The father was looking at me, his tired, pleasant eyes half-smiling and eager. He seemed for the moment to have almost forgotten his trouble. But as I laid down the little book, above us we heard an opening door, low voices and footsteps, then the opening and closing of another door, and again silence. The man stood tense, rigid, his head raised, as if listening. He put out a hand which trembled slightly, and laid it on my arm.

"Hark!" he whispered. "They are at him now. My God! Oh, my poor little lad!"

Already the heavy sickly sweet odor of anesthetics was stealing through the house, that odor so mysteriously suggestive of mortality. There was not a sound in the silent house, but a presence hovered there, nevertheless, and we felt it. Silently I held out my hand in farewell, and, with an heroic effort to pull himself together he gripped it hard, and we parted without another word. I left him standing, erect and calm, but even as I turned to close the door I saw him leaning again over his cabinet of treasures with bowed head. So I left him to his solitary vigil.

As I was entering my own door a cab dashed up to the gate, and out of it stepped Mr. Wimple. He came into the house, his usually florid face quite pale and concerned, his manner nervous.

"What's all this?" he cried. "God bless

my soul, Lingard, what's all this I hear about that fine little chap, Humphrey?"

"Too true," I said gloomily, and told him all I knew.

It seemed that he had read an account of the accident in *The Sun*, while crossing in the ferry, and had come straight back to the city to hear particulars. Now he could do nothing but sit mopping his bald forehead with a huge silk handkerchief, polishing his glasses, and occasionally exclaiming in an undertone: "God bless my soul."

And as we sat there Mrs. Binks showed in Miss Ellis and Millicent, and we all shook hands silently.

"This poor girl," said Miss Ellis, in a low voice to me, "could not rest. Her father is out of town for the night and I could not leave her, so we thought we would come along here for the latest news."

So we sat, we four, less than a year ago utter strangers, brought together in our lives by that little fifth, who was not present, but who, even now, was binding us closer, with firmer bonds than ever, the bonds of mutual sorrow. We talked in low voices, except for Millicent, who spoke not at all, save in monosyllables, if addressed. Mr. Wimple and I at first made efforts to speak on everyday topics, but the women were unresponsive and we, too, fell silent. So we sat in heavy silence waiting. It had been decided that as the vital question was to be decided by the operation, we should all remain together till that was over.

Once Mr. Wimple burst forth irritably:

"How much longer are we to wait, Lingard? I can't stand much more of this," and I answered:

"From an hour to an hour and a half, the nurse said. After that they would—know."

"These operations—I hate 'em," he said testily. And the time ticked on. I was longing, yet dreading for the time of probation to pass—dreading lest the awful uncertainty and suspense should become the more awful knowledge. But slowly, slowly, the clock hand moved round to the hour, crept past it to the quarter, and I rose slowly. I was conscious that I was deadly pale, and my voice shook strangely as I said in deliberately measured tones:

"It is about time now, I think. I will just go and—inquire for news."

A great explosive sigh broke from Mr. Wimple, and he rose hastily.

"Yes, for goodness sake—anything is better than this sitting still—we will all go."

Millicent, too, had risen. Her face was startlingly pale, and her eyes unnaturally large and dark.

"Yes," she said, with a long sigh. "Let us go."

Then Miss Ellis had one of her beautiful inspirations, for she said to Mr. Wimple:

"I wonder—I am very tired, and rather shaken by this sad event—if you would be so very kind, Mr. Wimple, as to wait here with me, and let Mr. Lingard and Miss Lynn bring us the news?"

I knew it was an effort for this proudly shy little woman, for her cheeks were colored softly, but I blessed her in my heart.

"Why—ah! Certainly, Miss Ellis," answered Mr. Wimple. "Delighted, I'm sure," and he sat down slowly, but I could see he was puzzled. Just as we were leaving the room Mr. Wimple smote his knee, exclaiming half under his breath:

"Of course—God bless my soul! What an old fool I am!" And the look he gave Miss Ellis was wholly admiring.

Millicent and I went along in silence. The distance was trifling, but I was conscious of conflicting desires, that it might be shorter still, and so get suspense over, or that it might be twice as long so that hope might still live. And

I think the girl at my side felt the same, for at times she walked quickly, almost in a feverish hurry, and then her steps would lag. But at length we came in sight of the house, and as we did so there came rushing towards us a swaying, humming, dark monster, with two enormous, round, intolerably bright eyes, and stopped at the gate, throbbing and panting, its huge orbs now glaring and goggling, and throwing two bright streams of light far down the dark road. Millicent gave a cry, and clutched me with trembling hands.

"There, there!" I said soothingly, holding those hands tightly. "It is only the doctor's car."

"Oh, I hate them!" she said shuddering. "I shall always hate them after this."

We went up the steps of the house together. The door was ajar, the house very still, and that sickly permeating odor still hanging heavy in the quiet air. At the first whiff of it Millicent turned faint, and I sent her to wait in the garden. Softly I crept into the silent lighted hall, but it seemed deserted, till hearing a long-drawn gasp I raised my eyes, startled, and saw Beenie, seated on the top stair, her elbows propped upon her knees, her swollen face upon her fists. She came down to me, dabbing her poor eyes with a sodden handkerchief.

"I've cried till I can't cry any more," she said dismally. "I've been a-sitting there so't I could git every scrap of news the minute the doctors or nurse come out. One of 'em did come just now, an' nearly fell over me. He was pretty narsty about it, too, but I just kep' on taking no notice of it, and askin' an' askin' till 'e told me. It ain't over yet—but pretty near, I should think, for I think I 'eard 'is car come just now—narsty murderin' things. I'd like to stick knives an' hatpins without shields into all their wheels."

"So you know nothing yet, Beenie?" I said, with a sigh, for I dreaded to go back to that waiting girl with no comfort.

"Nothing," said she. "No one does. Those doctor fellers always keeps things secret as long as they can. The poor father don't know nothing. He just keeps walkin' up an' down, up an' down, for hours in the study. And her!"—(the scorn in Beenie's tones warmed my heart to her)—"o' course she don't know nothing. So 'eart-broke *she* was, she 'ad to 'ave a sleepin' powder to soother her off—a sleepin' powder, mind you, when for all she knew, when next she woke, she would n't have a child to sorrow over. I've no patience!" concluded Beenie, with a vindictive scowl, in which sentiment I heartily concurred. I went back to Millicent, who waited, a blur of white, in the shade of drooping pepper-boughs.

"No news," I said, and I heard the long-drawn quivering sigh, half disappointment, half relief.

"Is good news?" I added gently, but she broke out impatiently:

"We will wait here till we hear—something. I could not go away now."

So we waited in the soft scented darkness of the summer night. We waited in silence. There seemed nothing to say, but in the darkness my hand sought and found Millicent's, and it was not withdrawn, and if the strong clasp of my fingers gave her one half the comfort which the clinging pressure of hers gave to me, I am indeed glad. Overhead the great stars shone like jewels in the velvet blackness; a flowering creeper twining round the veranda posts filled the night with divine odor, and the light from Phil's window shone out across the gloom. It was somehow comforting. Then the door was opened, a stream of cheery light fell across the steps, and the doctor stepped out. With a long breath I loosed the girl's hands and stepped forward. The doctor peered.

"Ah, it's you, Lingard! Yes, all over—and a most successful operation—most successful.

A very interesting case altogether. Now these operations as a rule are——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Millicent ruthlessly. "But—but the child?" adding with unconscious irony, "No doubt the operation was successful, but will Phil live?"

The doctor lifted his hat.

"Pardon, Lingard, I did not see that you had a lady with you. Live? We hope so, we hope so, dear madam. He stood it splendidly, and we have great hopes of him, great hopes. It's early days to promise anything, but we'll pull the little chap through yet, please God!"

And with that, this Messenger of Light, in a rather shabby motor coat, and carrying a black bag, ran down the steps, and sprang into his motor, and we felt, at least, it should have been a fiery chariot which disappeared in space, instead of this very modern contrivance, which after a series of ear-splitting noises, shot away with a long hum rising to a crescendo, and left an abominable smell of petrol behind. It was not until we heard the muffled vibrant hum grow faint and die in the distance that we spoke a word, though we had stood clasping each other's hands, motionless. Then I heard a soft little sound beside me, and I knew it was Millicent weeping in the darkness.

"Darling!" I said, and drew her into my arms. It all seemed so natural that I wondered I had never taken Phil's advice, and done it before, and there was this dear girl, crying against my shoulder just as freely as Olivia Mary had done. I held her close, and said a good many tender, foolish things, I dare say, and by and by I heard her little broken sobbing whispers.

"Oh, I'm so glad—so glad! Can it possibly be true?"

"Everything's true," I said sturdily. "And everything's glorious," and in my pocket I could feel the weight of Phil's dear, absurd talisman.

Then we turned home, and as we went, Millicent's soft hand in mine, I cried out, like a jubilant boy:

"Why, it's lovelier than ever!"

"What is lovelier?" asked Millicent shyly. I think this sweet new shyness of hers was the most enchanting thing I had ever seen.

"Why," said I gayly, "a particularly large and beautiful bubble, painted with all the colors of the rainbow."

When we came in, Mr. Wimple started up from his chair and burst out irritably:

"Good Lord! How much longer do you

intend to keep us waiting? It's scandalous!"

But Millicent, with her dewy dark eyes shining like stars, and her cheeks a blaze of lovely color, cried out:

"Oh, Miss Ellis, they—think Phil will live—they think dear little Phil will live."

Mr. Wimple sat down heavily, and began blowing his nose and furiously polishing his glasses exclaiming: "God bless my soul! Live? I should think so!"

But I think Miss Ellis divined there was more in Millicent's gracious radiance of shining eyes and rosy flame, for taking the girl's two hands in hers, she kissed her very tenderly, saying:

"I am so very, very glad—*for everything!*"

And suddenly, without warning, she burst into tears. Up started Mr. Wimple.

"Poor soul, poor soul!" he cried, and, seating himself on the couch beside her, passed an arm about the slender upright little figure, and fell to patting her hands and her shoulders gently.

"There, there, have your cry out. This little creature has been a brick—a trump—full of courage and kindness, while I have been nothing but—a—kettle threatening to boil over—a mad bull trying to break away—look at the room!"

He waved his arm defiantly, and indeed the room did look rather as though a whirlwind had passed through it.

"But she kept me up, this brave little woman did," he continued, again patting Miss Ellis's hand, "with her tact and courage, and calmed me and helped me. I think the waiting worked on my nerves—I lost a boy of Phil's age myself—and *no* particulars," he concluded so fiercely, and glared at us so challengingly that, had we contemplated drawing him out on the subject, we should have certainly abandoned the idea at once. Miss Ellis was almost her collected little self again, and gently putting aside Mr. Wimple's hand, sat as upright as ever, looking very much ashamed.

"I'm afraid I've been very foolish," she said, putting back a stray lock of really pretty brown hair, just silvering, which Millicent immediately pulled down again, saying:

"It's a shame to bundle away such pretty hair, as you do," and Mr. Wimple said, with ponderous but quite sincere gallantry;

"Well, if the angels in heaven are ever foolish, you have been so to-night."

Then, with good-nights all round, he hurried off.

"Isn't he a dear?" cried Millicent, and Miss Ellis said staidly:

"I find him a very entertaining and interesting man."

"Yes, but all the same," laughed Millicent, and it was good to hear that sweet, low laugh again, "he has knocked your hat over one ear."

Miss Ellis blushed like a girl, and hastily straightened her hat.

"Poor fellow," she said. "He has had a sad history. His wife was a very delicate woman, and they were ten years without a child. Then the little boy came, but, as he told you, he died at about Phil's age, and the wife died soon after, broken-hearted. He says that ever since he could never bear to look at a boy, but Phil simply conquered him, in spite of himself. He told me all this in a very jerky way, at intervals during the evening, as he was tramping about the room, and I did not dare to question him, or even to sympathize, for I could see how painful he found it to speak of it."

Then, as Miss Ellis was to spend the night with Millicent, I took them both home, but though the former very discreetly walked into the hall ahead of us, and I caught at Millicent's hand, she whispered very shyly:

"Not to-night—my heart is too full."

So I had to do without my good-night kiss, on which I had been speculating all the way home, but I was too happy to fret much about it, and, after all, it was—oh, blessed thought!—only deferred. A gleam of light from under the kitchen door as I got in reminded me of poor faithful Binks, and my heart smote me, for she did not yet know the hopeful news. I found her asleep on a chair before the cold range. Her face was disfigured with tears; and in her lap she held a small shell-covered box, which Phil had given her at Christmas. She had always admired this box, and Phil admired it, if possible, more, and in moments when it seemed Mrs. Binks did not quite appreciate him, was wont to remind her: "I gave you that lovely box, you know."

I touched her on the shoulder, and she started wide awake, and as her eyes met mine she cried:

"Don't tell me he's gone, but there—did n't I always say it?" and threw her apron over her head, and began to cry.

"Gone! No fear!" I cried. "Nor going, Mrs. Binks. The operation is over, and was very successful."

But Mrs. Binks, like your born pessimist all the world over, was ever reluctant to give up a gloomy view of events, and though I saw the relief struggle with the doubt in her face, she said instantly:

"Sugsessful? Oh, no doubt! These h'operations always are sugsessful, in a manner of speaking, so to speak, and next thing the patient up and dies on you. Why, there's me own first cousin's husband's sister as underwent ——"

"Oh, never mind your husband's cousin's and so forth—" I cried. "But aren't you glad—glad—glad that Phil is to be spared to plague you again?"

"Glad?" she said, and two tears stole slowly down her mottled cheeks. "Why if 'e come this blessed minute an' filled me clean kitchen with dirt from end to end, I'd welcome 'im with open arms. Why, that little feller—I've never 'ad no child of me own"—her voice was a husky whisper now—"but somehow Phil has seemed to make—up—for——"

Her voice faltered into silence, and the kitchen clock ticked loudly in the stillness. Suddenly, snatching up the lighted candle, she said accusingly:

"Lor, look at the time! Keeping me out of me bed till this hour of night—a parcel of men and boys——"

And with that she swept out of the room, leaving me to grope my way out in the darkness as best I could.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH THE MYSTERIOUS D. A. REVEALS HIMSELF

VERY early next morning I was out to get news of Phil, and the report sent me home jubilant:

"Everything going on well."

I plunged into my cold tub, and out again, with delight in its freshness. I whistled loudly as I toweled myself, and only desisted while shaving, because I preferred not to go abroad adorned with sticking plaster on this most glorious day of my life. Coming to the breakfast table, where Mrs. Binks, trying to look solemn, but with a light in her eye which belied her, was putting the last touches, I astonished her by executing a few steps of a *pas de seul*, whereat one of Phil's slippers flew off, hit the ceiling, rebounded on to a gas bracket, and eventually landed in the butter.

"Well," cried Mrs. Binks, "and who's to eat that butter, I'd like to know? And there goes another of my mantles—as if there was n't enough to pay for mantles in this house, a'ready, with the rampaging that goes on, and a parcel of men an' boys——"

"What's the odds, Mrs. Binks," I cried, "so long as Phil's getting better?" And walking to the mantelpiece I set up Phil's talisman conspicuously in the very middle of it.

"As to that," answered Mrs. Binks, who was scraping the butter off my slipper with a table-knife, "if the little dear's to get better, and I'd like to be as sure o' that as some, it's not me as would grudge the price of a thousand mantles, so to speak."

Which, considering I paid for the mantles, was very generous of her, but I understood that her sentiments did her credit none the less. Just then her eye fell on the horseshoe, and she ceased scraping the slipper.

"Well, I declare! What next! Cluttering up my tidy chimney piece with more rubbish, as though pipes an' tobacco tins, an' such smelly rubbish is n't bad enough, here's a dirty old horseshoe. One must draw the line somewhere, in a manner of speakin'."

She reached for the offending article to remove it, and I said off-handedly:

"That was given me by Phil, for luck."

I knew her affection for Phil, combined with a lively vein of superstition, would render that horseshoe sacred to her.

"Phil!—luck!" she muttered, and without a word she left the room, and the horseshoe remained where it was. After breakfast I wrote my first love letter to Millicent, at least the first that had ever found its way into the post bag, and at the office I rang her up and gave her the news of Phil, which, it appeared, she had already got for herself. After expressing our mutual pleasure at this happy state of affairs, we fell to talking of ourselves. I asked her if she would lunch with me, but she declined, also my suggestion that I should come up and lunch with her, but she would see me in the afternoon. Later on, she said:

"Don't be silly!" and again later, "Please remember telephone girls have ears," but by and by I forgot that fact again, and she said "Good-by," and left the telephone. Oh, but I was happy! I was rejoiced to find her morning mood was that which I knew best, very sweet, but self-possessed and overlaid with a pretty veneer of mockery, which I knew only veiled the tender loveliness of her nature, and I thought of the poet's "rose set all about with little willful thorns." Sorrow and submission and humility were not meet cloaks for Millicent's gay courage and imperiousness.

During the morning Mr. Wimple called, and after hearing the report of Phil, and expressing his delight, he sat for some time in silence, his ebony stick upright between his knees, and his hands folded on its silver knob, his chin resting on them and his eyes on my waste-paper basket.

"Uncommonly fine little lady she is," he said suddenly, apropos of nothing.

"She is, indeed," I cried fervently. "If there had n't already been so many happiest men in the world, I should really think I was that one."

"The sensible, kind, tactful way in which she calmed me down was wonderful—wonderful—" By which I perceived he was speaking of Miss Ellis, and had not even heard my interjection, which, with the egotism of a lover, of course referred to Millicent. Soon after he took his departure, and I made a determined effort, and settled to a couple of hours' work.

The first few rapturous moments alone with Millicent belong only to ourselves, and no one else has any concern with them. But later, we found ourselves side by side on the couch in Millicent's sitting room, and her hands were in mine.

"To think," I murmured, "sweetheart, that we should have wasted so much time in misunderstandings and stupid disagreements!"

"But I'm afraid we shall always squabble," she said naughtily.

"I'm afraid we shall," I agreed equably. "You are such an aggravating darling, you know."

"And you are perfectly exasperating," she retorted. "You know you are!"

"Why, you're getting in a rage now," I said teasingly, just for the pleasure of seeing the red rush up into her cheeks, mentally deciding she really looked the prettiest of all with that color, and the sparkle in her brown eyes.

"I'm no such thing," she declared, "and if I am, it's you who make me do it."

And then, because we were really too happy to even play at quarreling, we both burst out laughing, and I instantly declared that Millicent of the laughter sprites and dimples was the loveliest Millicent of all, and then changed my mind, because all of a sudden she became sweetly serious, with a wistful droop to her mouth, and her eyes large and pathetic.

"How I did hate that horrid Miss Lee!" she sighed.

"And how I wanted to knock the head off that brute, D. A." I said malevolently.

Millicent started. A mischievous dimple appeared.

"Ah! yes, D. A." she said. "You must n't call D. A. a brute."

"You—like him still, then?" I asked gloomily.

"And always shall," she returned positively. "Remember, I have known him very much longer than I have known you."

"I'm not likely to forget it," I returned shortly.

"Oh, you must try to like him for my sake," she said. "You must meet him. You'll like him, I'm sure, when you know him as I do."

"Not I!" I said, and frowned gloomily at the carpet.

"Let me introduce you. I'll do it now."

"Now!" I cried, with a start. "Is he here?"

"He lives here."

"Another boarder?"

"Yes—another boarder."

Heavens, I thought, little did I know the enormous, daily, hourly advantage over me this fellow had had in his wooing. But from that thought rose the pardonable vanity in the reflection, that, given all the advantages of propinquity on his side, yet I had proved the victor, and this soothing thought bred a tolerance in me, merely contemptuous, not actively antagonistic, even pitying.

"Come," said Millicent, her hands still in mine.

"Well," said I, "just to please you, but I know I shan't like the fellow, and anyhow he'll keep. Let him wait. He's not going to spoil my first perfect hour alone with you. He's spoiled many another."

"Poor old boy!" she said softly, and for a moment a pair of lips like the brush of a butterfly's wing touched my cheek.

"Little girl! My little girl!" I whispered.

She submitted to a kiss or two, but with her pretty imperiousness she would have her way, and, grumbling under my breath, I followed her out on to a balcony. She peeped over the railing, and beckoned me.

"There!" she said, and nodded.

I looked over. Below was a small square of grass, inclosed by high brick walls over which ran a riot of climbing roses, and in the center of the plot grew a fine pepper tree. But there was no one there, except old Mr. Lynn, in smoking jacket and slippers, dozing in a deck chair, the paper on his knees and a dog asleep at his feet. I drew back and gazed at Millicent, bewildered.

"Well!" she said demurely.

"Well," said I. "There's no one there but your father."

"That's him," she said, regardless of grammar, her eyes dancing.

"What!" I cried. "D. A.——"

"d" she finished softly.

"D—a—d?" I repeated stupidly, and then a blaze of light broke in upon me. "Oh, you rogue!" I cried. "You teasing, tiresome, aggravating—as dear old Phil would say—piece of naughtiness, you!"

I drew her within the shadow of the striped sunblinds, and kissed her again and again, and when I let her escape, she explained the D. A.

"When I was quite a wee thing," she said, "my father wanted to teach me to spell 'Daddy.' I got as far as D—A all right, and there I always stuck. I would say glibly enough D—a—, 'd' he would hint, and I would instantly retort "a" and so D. A. it remained, as a sort of nickname between us."

She laughed joyously at the changed expression on my face, and then, waving her little hand imperiously, she said:

"And now you'd better go down and state your business with him. I told him you wished to speak to him, and the dear old innocent said he supposed it was about the mortgage on his freehold. So run down, and when you come back I may have a cup of tea for you."

"Not I!" I said. "I fear you have no business instinct or you would hardly suggest waking an elderly man, on a hot afternoon, to ask him for his most precious possession. Why, it would be just courting opposition."

"Well," she laughed, "as that 'most precious possession' part of your speech is rather handsome, you shall have your tea first and then speak about the mortgage."

"The most precious mortgage it will ever be my lot to hold," I whispered, my lips against her ear. "And I warn you I intend to foreclose without delay."

"It's a pity, though," she remarked mischievously, slipping away, "that you will never like the fellow."

"You——" I began. But she evaded my hand, and left me with a gay little laugh.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH WE "ALL LIVE HAPPY EVER AFTER"

I WAS the first visitor permitted to Phil, and then, as the nurse warned me, only for a few minutes. I found a very wan, large-eyed little Phil, still swathed in bandages, and his voice hardly louder than a whisper, but the dear, merry smile peeped out when he saw me. I sat down and took the childish fingers in mine, but found not a word to say, for I could not trust my voice for the moment.

"Ruddy," whispered Phil, "are n't you glad the big motor car did n't make me quite dead?"

"Glad—little chap?" was all I could say.

"*I've* got a bone in my arm now, like Binks has in her leg," said Phil. "But daddy says if I lie quite still it'll go away, and he's going to give me a magi-glantern."

"That's famous," said I. "And poor old Binks says she is going to make you the biggest cake you've ever seen, when you're well enough to come and eat it."

"How big?" asked Phil. "As big as—as the piller?"

"I should n't wonder. But say, little chap, are n't you talking too much? Am I to go, nurse?"

"Don't go, Ruddy." The weak little fingers clutched mine.

"Well, just a little longer," said nurse.

"That's nurse," said Phil. "She's nice. She says I've got to marry her—but I can't, Ruddy. I promised Beenie years ago."

"There you are, then," said I, and nurse laughed.

"Are you going to take my temperacher?" asked Phil. "She does every day, Ruddy. How much is it to-day, nursie?"

"He takes a tremendous interest in his temperature," said nurse, smiling. "Chiefly, I think, because it has to do with figures."

"Oh! so you've found him out, then," I said, and Phil repeated:

"How much, nursie? About five hundred?"

"About that," nurse agreed. "Quite a nice lot anyhow."

"Five hundred's a good lot, is n't it, Ruddy?" said Phil contentedly, his voice a little languid now, as I rose to go.

A week later I brought Millicent to see Phil. Before going upstairs she asked to see Phil's mother. She was a little pale and resolute looking, but I did not suspect that she was about to tell the mother that she had been in charge of the boy at the time of his accident, so that no longer any blame might rest on me. Phil's mother, who was all dressed for going out, rustled and jingled into the room, buttoning her gloves.

"How do you do, Miss Lynn—Mr. Lingard? So sweet of you to come," she babbled, "and I'm so sorry to be going out, but I'm sure Phil will love to see you."

But when my sweet, brave girl, very pale and earnest, made her little confession, the Butterfly burst out gayly:

"Oh, my dear! don't say another word about it. I'm sure it was sweet of you to be troubled with the boy at all. I was very upset naturally—a mother's feelings, you know. And I'm afraid I said a number of horrid things to poor Mr. Lingard—my husband assures me I did. But I should have made allowances had I known the state of affairs between you and Mr. Lingard, who thoroughly disapproves of me, you know." And here she flirted a pair of big shallow eyes at me, from under her huge hat, and gave a gay tinkling laugh. "Congratulations to you both! And now I really must run away. I'm going with friends to the matinee, Oscar Asche, you know, and Lily Brayton.

So sweet, is n't she? So you really must excuse me. Give Phil my love, will you? I have n't time to see him, poor darling, but will run up for a few minutes directly I come in. *Good*-by."

So she jingled and rustled away with her perfumes and flowers, and I drew a long breath, and drew my girl to the open window, where we stood a moment in silence, before going upstairs. I left Millicent hidden by the door, while I went in to Phil. He was looking more like his old self, propped up with pillows, and a tinge of color was in his cheeks.

"Here's a friend to see you, Phil," I cried. "Guess!"

"Three guesses?" he asked, and began wrinkling his forehead, but Millicent was too impatient and ran forward, her pretty eyes full of tears. "It's dear old Miller," cried Phil, in a glad little voice of welcome.

"Phil!" was all the girl could say, and dropping on her knees at the bedside, laid her tear-wet cheek down on the little hand.

I stole out and left them together.

Weeks later I gave another party, at which Phil was the guest of honor, a taller, thinner Phil, with a funny little boyish cropped head, and eyes grown two sizes too large for him, but with the old beaming smile and merry laugh. Millicent was there, and Miss Ellis and Mr. Wimple, and Phil's father came for an hour with a strange new content in his eyes, when they rested on his little son; Olivia Mary was there, as autocratic as ever, wanting to manage everybody's affairs, and Miss Elizabeth Aschman was there, too, because, hearing there was to be a party, she had very sociably happened along about that time, and settled down quite happily, and it seemed to be nobody's business to tell her to go. Reggie Blair had been invited, and he arrived, very immaculate in a white duck cricketing suit and tan belt and stockings, but there was no getting him to come in. If any one attempted it, he simply ran from them. He hung about the farthest limits of the garden, and threw clods at my fowls, and shouted in a very loud and blustering voice at Phil and the little girls. Olivia Mary said he was "showing off," but only Millicent and I seemed to understand that all this *brusquerie* was simply a kind of fierce shyness, which strove to hide itself under an assumption of blustering ease. When tea appeared, Olivia Mary and Phil trotted off to bring Master Blair in, but returned unsuccessful, though Olivia Mary said she had told him about the chocolates and the jelly in little red glasses.

"I'll fetch him," said Millicent, and slipped out into the garden. Master Blair moved off briskly in the direction of the gate, but at something Millicent called out he stopped to parley, and they drew step by step nearer, where he stood hanging his head, and shaking it, and kicking at the gravel. Then Millicent came in alone.

"Wild man still untamed?" I asked.

"Leave him alone," she answered; "it will be all right," and she set a chair close to the door. A few minutes later Reggie Blair came in. He came in with rather an air of swaggering bravado, very red in the face, but Millicent having forcibly checked Olivia Mary's outcry, he sat down on the extreme edge of the chair, and chewed the elastic of his straw hat. Presently Millicent carried some cakes to him, and in an incredibly short space of time his was the loudest and most insistent of the children's voices. It was he, indeed, who instituted the fascinating game of trying who could take the longest draft of lemonade without drawing breath, the result of which was that the correct Miss Aschman choked violently, and had to be taken out by Miss Ellis, and ignominiously thumped on the back. Even Olivia Mary had to subside in the face of Reggie's vociferousness, a fact which, rather than incensing that young lady, only earned her respect. Now that Phil was no longer an invalid, and interesting as such, Olivia Mary was beginning to tire of him. In the first moments of their reunion, while Phil was still in bed, she had bestowed upon him her Coronation medal, but as he became more and more like himself, she repented of her generosity, and demanded it back. Phil very reluctantly yielded it, explaining to me, "She really and truly gave it to me, Ruddy, and now she says it was only for a lend." It was good to see my merry Phil in his old place again, playing host in my house. The table was a sight to behold, Mrs. Binks having excelled herself in the providing of pink sugared cakes and colored jellies, and the *chef-d'œuvre* was a beautiful iced cake tastefully inscribed with Phil's name, and "Welkim," in colored "hundreds and thousands," and surrounded by a perfect *chevaux de frise* of blanched almonds. Millicent had made a thing of beauty of Phil's emblem of luck, gilding it, and threading it with narrow gayly hued ribbons, and it hung upon the wall behind his chair. Phil was to cut his own cake, and Mrs. Binks was called in to witness the ceremony. Phil took the knife in his hand, and we all had to wait in tense silence while he counted the bristling almonds. Then the point of the knife slipped on the smooth icing, and Mrs. Binks suggested, in her best manner, that she should assist, as, said she, "My hicing is always stiffened that firm, it requires a 'and with some h'experience, in a manner of speaking, so to speak!"

And soon, great rich brown wedges, frosted with white, and stuffed fat with sultanas and currants, and candied peel, lay on all the plates, and Miss Aschman recalled, for the edification of the company, a cake she once had, so big it took a tea tray to hold it. After tea we had music, this time on my own, I may say "our" own piano, in view of the time, not far distant, when Millicent and I hope to enter into joint possession of all goods and chattels. And then Mr. Wimple, looking only a little embarrassed, told us a piece of news about himself and Miss Ellis—Clarissa, as he called her—and their joint future, that made me grasp and wring his hand heartily, and Millicent throw her arms about Miss Ellis, who stood blushing and pretty as a girl. And then we drank their healths in lemonade, and he retorted by proposing ours, which, all the lemonade being gone, was honored in tea, and Millicent, being very excited, drank her own health loyally, and when, with some laughter, this was pointed out to her, she only said with gay defiance:

"Well, I don't care! Why should n't one drink to one's own happiness? I want to be happy."

"And so do we all, dear," said Miss Ellis gently, "and it seems—oh! it does seem that it is coming true, at last."

And in those fervent, half-faltering words of hers we all read what her lips would never have uttered, a tale of poverty and struggle and ill-luck and hope deferred, and Millicent, to hide the tears in her eyes cried, "Oh! don't let us forget to drink Phil's health," and I swung him on to my shoulder.

Then Mr. Wimple cried suddenly:

"God bless my soul! I'll be forgetting my head next," and darted out into the hall. He returned with a black bag, from which he produced a couple of bottles of champagne, apologizing to me for what he called "the liberty," and which, he said, he looked upon as his contribution to the feast, though he had already, like a veritable Santa Claus, rained chocolates and sweets on the company.

Well, with a merry popping of corks, the healths were drunk all over again, and Phil's in particular, and the children were allowed a thimble-full each, and, with one accord, they declared they liked the lemonade much better than that kind of ginger beer. I still held Phil on my shoulder.

"Speech! Speech!" I cried, and Millicent clapped her hands and cried:

"Yes! Phil must make a speech."

But when it was explained to him, Phil became very red and embarrassed.

"I can't, Ruddy," he said. "I don't know how to—I don't know what to say."

I whispered a few words to him, and bravely he began.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm very 'elighted," then in a loud whisper to me, "What's next? What'd you say, Ruddy?—very 'elighted. Speak louder, I can't hear you—oh, yes!—'elighted to see all my friends, and I'm sure they ought to be very grateful. What are you laughing at, Miller?—I won't say any more."

"Yes, yes, go on," cried Millicent, "they ought—you're quite right."

"An'," went on Phil very rapidly, "I hope they've enjoyed theirselves. I can't remember any more. Please put me down, Ruddy."

I lowered him amid vociferous hand-clapping, and Millicent snatched him up in her arms.

"Darling little Phil," she cried, "who

brought us all together, and brought us all our happiness, too!"

And in the momentary silence which followed we heard Olivia Mary's chilly little voice.

"Just 'cause Phil went an' g-got ill, he's the p-pet of this p-p-party."

Later, when they had all gone, with the exception of Millicent, whom I had prevailed upon to wait a few moments, so that we might take Phil home together, I left the two together while I went to change my coat.

When I came back Millicent was sitting on the couch on the veranda, with Phil curled up on her lap. I sat down beside her and put my arms right round the two, girl and boy, and drew the two dear heads against my shoulder.

"What a bundle of people," laughed Phil.

"A bundle of love!" I whispered against Millicent's ear, and smiling at Phil, "the two little people I love best in the world."

"There! You've told her your own self," cried Phil. "'Sides Miller's not little. She's a big lady, but you've told her now, Ruddy."

"Perhaps she knew it all along, Phil," said Millicent, putting her cheek against his.

"An' does Ruddy know the one you love best?" asked Phil.

"I think he's guessed," she said, and I kissed her hair softly.

"Tell us a story," suggested Phil, the opportunist, and for once, nothing loath, I began.

"There were once three people in the world——"

"Only three?" interrupted Phil incredulously.

"Only three that mattered. It was a world of their own."

"Oh! G'won!"

"There were a Man and a Maid and a Jolly Kid, and the Man loved the Maid, and the Maid loved the Man, only she could n't be quite sure——"

"Did n't nobody love the Jolly Kid?"

"Oh, yes!" said Millicent quickly, "they both loved him, and were very sure about that."

"How do you know?" asked Phil, sitting up, "it is n't your story."

Millicent blushed, and I laughed, and continued:

"Only the Man never told her he loved her."

"Why did n't he?"

"Oh, because he had n't the sense to come in out of the rain, I suppose."

"Not even if he was getting soaking wet? He must've been a silly."

"He was, and so——"

"Why did n't the Maid tell him she loved him best in the world?"

"Because she thought it was his business to find out, I suppose, and she was a very sweet, wise Maid, so she must have been right even though it did seem a little cruel to him——"

"What nonsense are you telling the child?" murmured Millicent, the soft color burning in her cheeks.

"Shall I stop?" I asked, and after a moment's hesitation she said:

"N-no!" and looking at me from under her dark lashes, "G'won."

So, bending down, I told the rest of the story for her ear alone. Phil, whose eyes were heavy with sleep, half-dozed against the soft rise and fall of her breast, hearing no more of the story save the low murmur of my voice. I told her my story of the hopes and fears of the past, and aspirations for the future, my glowing plans for making our life together a thing of gladness and mutual happiness and understanding. I ceased, and gently turned her dear averted face to mine, and as her warm, sweet lips met mine, the child in her arms stirred, opened his eyes—and smiled dreamily.

"An' they all lived happy ever after."

AOB
L21C82

EJU

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 779 091 8